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The Lived Reality of English Language Learners in an Urban High School: Perspectives of Students and Staff

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The Lived Reality of English Language Learners in an Urban High School: Perspectives of Students and Staff

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Nettie Faye Mathis Owens, and to my father, Morris Clayton Owens. My mom revered language and literacy her whole life, and supported the education of her children, foregoing opportunities to continue her own formal education. My dad is a principled and creative career educator who continually inspired me by his example. The love and sacrifice of my parents brought me my opportunities for education and learning.

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The research that this dissertation represents was made possible by the generosity of the English Language Learners and the staff of Austin's Central High School. Central High School, you are my story. Lastly, I wish to thank the great University of Texas that I am so proud to be part of.

The Lived Reality of English Language Learners in an Urban High School: Perspectives of Students and Staff

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English Language Learners represent a growing and academically underserved minority in US public schools. Historically, ELLs have experienced less than desired achievement goals such as timely high school graduation and well-developed English facility. Certain factors--influenced by school organizations—contribute to the overall success of these students. Among these are: quality of instructional programs, school connectedness, student self-image and self-efficacy, and ongoing progress toward academic and related goals. Educational decisions do not always reflect all knowledge regarding ELL student learning; and expectations for ELL academic achievement continue to rise.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived reality of English Language Learners in one urban high school by comparing the perceptions of ELL students with the perceptions of staff members who work with them. By comparing the students' perceptions with the perceptions of staff, it may be possible to identify a "shared reality"--a summary of what daily life and the overall school experience are like for

many ELLs in this individual school. Perceptions exclusive to students or to staff may indicate important differences between what the two groups believe, experience, and communicate regarding school.

From this study, schools who serve ELLs may gain a deeper understanding of how to enhance the lived experience and the overall success of ELL students—who individually and collectively struggle to thrive and succeed in school, despite considerable obstacles and unfavorable odds.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

Overview

In this chapter, I introduce the readers to the research. I begin by providing an overview of the research purpose and the premises upon which the research is based, and identify the four research questions that the study addresses. I then supply a definition of terms that the reader will need to be familiar with. Next, I define the problem(s) that led me to pursue this study. Subsequently, I discuss the purpose, possible contributions, and limitations of the research. Finally, I describe the organization of the dissertation into its eight chapters.

Premises of the Research

This study maintains several premises related to the importance of high school academic and other school-based influences, activities and experiences on students' lives. It is one premise that, for English Language Learners, certain factors relate to overall success in school, and that among these are factors delineated in this study. These factors are not assumed to be the only contributors to student success; they are merely the dimensions considered within the scope of this particular study. Nor does this dissertation suggest that these dimensions affect students in a set order or in particular ways; for example, school connectedness may well enhance students' self efficacy just as poor student self-image may affect the students' propensity to connect with the school.

A second premise is that the school organization is a complex mosaic of personnel, programs, interrelationships, and opportunities that profoundly affect these four school dimensions and their impact on students. "Quality of instructional programs", for example, has many components such as curriculum, relevance of teaching materials, and expertise of instructors. In addition, intervening factors such as lack of prior schooling might represent stronger influences on student effort and accomplishment. As students and staff members indicate in this study, the most significant determiner of success may be the student himself.

A third premise of this study is that the lived realities of students and the beliefs and perceptions of the organization's members may not match. While it is reasonable to expect some differences in purpose and perspective between the two groups, greater understanding and communication should be mutually beneficial. Students want to be happy and to succeed in school. With more information about the students themselves, school leaders and other staff members can make a greater impact on ELL students' attainment of these goals.

A fourth premise is that school policies and programs—although crafted thoughtfully--are often difficult to implement quickly and completely. Thus, the reality of what is occurring routinely with ELL students in a particular setting might not reflect the vision, values, or actions of the school district or campus leadership. Educational innovations take time and tactics to "sell" to

stakeholders, and certain conditions must exist before the change process can successfully go forward (Fullan 1991).

Significance of the Research

Central High School is not alone in its demographic make-up, nor unique in its efforts to design more effective programs for ELL students. This study seeks to explore the lived reality of ELL students at Central High School—as expressed by the students themselves, and corroborated through the perspectives and accounts of staff members who work with them directly. Qualitative research directly involving secondary English Language Learners has not previously been done in this particular school district, nor are similar studies reflected to a large extent in the research literature. More often, adult perspectives are sought, and student performance data alone is used to judge student success. While examination of student performance data such as achievement test scores and graduation rates is meaningful, the data alone does not explain why students succeed or fail in school. This study utilizes multiple data sources as is suggested by Denzin & Lincoln (1994) to gather more complete information regarding ELL school success in this particular setting.

If engagement and participation facilitate learning and foster future learning, discovering ways to promote student "buy in" is key to what students ultimately become and accomplish. Hopefully, arriving at the "big picture" of what ELL students think, feel, and experience daily will influence what teachers

do routinely. A secondary or "halo" effect may be that students and staff members will benefit simply from having been interviewed, heard, and considered. By accomplishing these goals, this research "breaks ground" for English Language Learner education.

Research Questions

Academic policies and pedagogy for English Language Learners (ELLs) have been a focus of educational research for some time, but subtler social and organizational factors--and their relationships to ELL success--also merit exploration. Hence, the core questions of this study consider both the fundamental aspects of schooling such as instruction, and the more affective areas that concern how these students think, feel, and perceive their environment and its influences. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of English Language Learners regarding their experiences in this high school?
2. What are the perceptions of staff members regarding ELLs and regarding the school's responses to their needs?
3. What is the congruence or incongruence between the ELL students' views of school and self, and the perceptions of staff?
4. What, if any, are the implications for organizational action or change to ensure greater overall success of this student group?

Rationale

Inequity in School Success for ELLs

Student achievement data and much educational research support the notion that the academic challenges that English Language Learners face are substantial (Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly & Callahan 2003). ELL students must acquire considerable formal and informal English skills within a very short time, and must perform competitively with their English-fluent peers in all subject areas from their first day of enrollment in school. In addition, factors such as unfamiliar school structures and surroundings, fragmented prior schooling, and out-of-school responsibilities such as employment may prohibit ELL students from full school participation and timely advancement toward academic and career goals. One Central High School Staff member gives this account of the multiple barriers one of her ELL students is facing:

> I have one student coming through now to do her finals, and I'm not sure if she is going to make it, because her parents are divorcing in Mexico. She lives over here with her sister. Her sister doesn't want her to go to school, but she wants her to work. Her sister says, "O.K., I left you the alarm clock. If you wake up, fine; if you don't wake up, that's up to you. You should not be going to school, you should be working." And, I am thinking, "Oh, gosh, and this child is trying to come to school? She has her sister and her parent situation. Who is talking with this one child? She is only sixteen years old."

The No Child Left Behind Law, enacted in 2001, was created to eliminate academic inequity by making schools accountable for the performance of every student group. The long-term goal of No Child Left Behind is that by the school year 2013-14, all students--regardless of language, socio-economics, disability, or

other defining characteristic or demographics--will perform at prescribed academic proficiency levels (USDE 2004). Toward this end, schools are scrambling to meet higher incremental achievement goals each year. ELL students must acquire English facility and fill learning gaps very quickly to master standard high school curriculum and pass exit examinations required for graduation. Though federal dollars support NCLB school improvement initiatives, educators doubt that equity for ELL students can be reached unless fundamental changes are made in how we serve these students.

In Texas, low-income graduates with good academic records can qualify for The Texas Grant which provides up to five years of free tuition and fees at any Texas college or university (TEA 2006). Students who otherwise might have little hope of financing studies at comparatively expensive institutions can now count on college educations that are basically free. However, many English Language Learners are not familiar with "the system" and fail to complete the application processes required for college admission and financial aid, while many ELLs who do plan on college attendance may be academically unprepared for college level curriculum and scholastic demands. As one Central High School teacher states:

> I would say there's a nucleus--maybe 30%--who feel they have had enough success to try college. Many ELL students are under the illusion that success is just going to happen. I have a student in the top ten percent of the class. His reading level is on an eighth grade level, and he is getting a $17,000 scholarship because he's in the top ten percent. Those types of situations are giving the students a false sense of security for academic success. I'm afraid that we are setting these children up for failure, even on the college level.

Demographic Trends

Statistics indicate a recent and rapid growth of the ELL populations in US schools. Indeed, the fastest growing student minority in the United States is the ballooning English Language Learner population, with projections indicating that the number of ELL students will continue to rise to an estimated forty percent of the K-12 population in the U.S. by the year 2030. In the Southwest United States, this rate of increase is even higher (US Bureau of the Census 2004). Despite this significant demographic shift, instruction and other academic supports for English Language Learners have not changed significantly over time.

Dropping Out Of School

The most severe outcome of school disconnection is termination of the schooling process--dropping out of school. Decades of statistically sound research indicate a strong relationship between being over age and dropping out (Roderick 1995; Valdivieso & Davis 1998). For ELL students who experience insufficient academic progress, this is real cause for concern. Students who are late registrants, those who change schools frequently, and students with poor attendance often do not experience continual progress toward graduation, prolonging their years in high school and increasing the odds of dropping out. It is not unusual to see large numbers of ELL students enrolled in freshman courses such as Algebra I or World Geography for a second or third year, alongside fourteen-year-old English-fluent peers who have just completed the eighth grade. Failing courses has cumulative effects; statistics indicate that the graduation rates

for Central High School ELLs have been far below those of the general school population for at least the past three years (TEA AEIS CIP 2006).

Purpose of the Study:

Identifying the Lived Reality of English Language Learners

Addressing the needs of all students is the responsibility of schools and educators. These complex needs include academic, social, and emotional developmental (Brazelton 1990). In Central High School, students identified as English Language Learners are performing at academic levels below their classmates, and experiencing a poor success rate overall as measured by indicators such as grade advancement, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, and graduation rates. In addition, according to staff members, English Language Learners at Central High School have a lower than average participation rate in extra-curricular activities and in classroom interactions. Some ELL students learn and use English quickly and comfortably, becoming accomplished scholars, but many ELL students do not acquire English skills quickly enough to achieve academic success in school or ensure subsequent success in life.

Central High School's English Language Learners have stories to relate, along with views to share of themselves and of their school environment. While many studies examine the quantitative differences between the academic progress of English Language Learners and other student groups (Ramirez 1993; Reimers

2000), fewer studies explore the perspectives of the students or examine the relationships of these perspectives as they relate to academic achievement and other indicators of success. Faculty members who work with ELL students form perceptions also--notions of just what effective instruction for ELLs should look like, and beliefs regarding what the school does and should provide. While the school organization's members may believe that they are creating the proper environment for ELL success by providing certain academic and related opportunities, ELL students may perceive a different reality. Conversely, ELL students may feel they are conveying or portraying certain things to staff members, while staff members formulate different concepts of what students think and experience.

This study explores aspects of school life that directly or indirectly affect ELL students and contribute to, or inhibit their overall success. The four dimensions addressed by the study are further delineated into critical aspects for each dimension. For example, quality of instructional programs entails curriculum, teacher effectiveness, program design, and adequacy of materials, among other factors (Frymier 2004). School connectedness involves student happiness, comfort, participation level, and school-family communication. Self-image and self-efficacy include students' beliefs in their own capabilities and accomplishments, their abilities to interact with others in the school environment, and pride and confidence that transfer to other areas of life. Ongoing progress

entails completing course work, passing examinations required for graduation, and preparation for post-graduation challenges.

This research is grounded in the sense that it employs traditional methods of survey and interview (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Patton 2002) to gather information regarding policies and practices, but it is also critical in the sense it seeks to identify less overt--but important forces such as power differentials. In the course of the study, I will survey and interview a representative sample of Central High School's ELLs, and involve students in important conversations regarding their beliefs, goals, relationships, and perceptions of the Central High School lived experience. Members of the school organization--including teachers, administrators, and other staff members--will then be surveyed and interviewed to elicit their views regarding Central High's English Language Learners, as well as their beliefs regarding school efforts and effects.

Simply identifying an academic achievement gap between English Language Learners and English fluent students is not enough; this study should produce new information. By defining the lived reality of these English Language Learners, we might better understand how the school community can ensure each student's well being, performance, progress, and probability of future success. The fact that many ELL students surmount formidable academic obstacles demonstrates that, for some, the system is working. Understanding the success of this minority within a minority will also be instrumental in bringing better understanding of what factors facilitate success for ELL students.

Donmeyer (1990) emphasizes the importance of single case studies as they allow others to "accompany" the researcher on his journey; thus those who read this dissertation may "share" in the research experience.

Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations. The first is that the qualitative data for the study will be gathered during a single school year, thus not reflecting changes over time. There are several reasons for this: One reason is mobility of the target population. Central High School does not maintain a static population, but experiences continued enrollment and dis-enrollment of ELL students. The second reason for gathering data during a single year is academic urgency. Central High's ELL students (constituting roughly forty percent of the student body) have lower than acceptable achievement levels that are not significantly improving (TEA CIP 2004; 2005; 2006). Most importantly, many English Language Learners often exit high school ill prepared for college or professional success. ELL students deserve more, and the time for study and action is now.

A second limitation is generalizability. This study will survey and explore a single high school campus whose population, personnel, programs, and environment may or may not precisely parallel others. Central High School has an unusual population when compared to the school district at large because its ELL group comprises a larger percentage of the general school population than any other district high school. Because of its qualitative nature and focus on

individuals, this study will hopefully illuminate issues that are not unique to a single setting (Peshkin 1990) and not specific to a single culture or ethnicity.

A third limitation is legal constraint. Programs, curricula, and instructional practices for English Language Learners are guided by federal and state law, as well as by district politics and policy. Thus, autonomy at the campus level is limited. Should this study yield useful information and recommendations, it is hoped that Central High School can make specific organizational or programmatic decisions to improve the ELL experience within those realms that the school has power and/or authority to act.

A fourth limitation involves positionality and values. While inadequate academic progress and dropping out of school inarguably qualify as major problems that educators recognize, students themselves may not always be aware of the consequences brought by incomplete education (Firestone & Shipps 2003). Many students interviewed in this study indicated that they are happy in school, and that the teachers and school serve them well, yet, many of these same students had been in academic distress, and some face the prospect of delayed graduation. This study assumes that schooling matters (Hanushek 2005; Reimers 2000), but that adolescents may not always be aware of their precarious scholastic status and its possible consequences.

This study is also limited by its complexity. According to Rist (1994), increasing the complexity of research methods may lead to results that are not easily applicable. During the research process, dimensions of schooling that

relate to school success began to emerge, and four were selected as topics. More specific or focused information might have been gathered had the study sought perspectives regarding only one or two dimensions--such as school connectedness and quality of instructional programs.

A final limitation is the identity and experience of the researcher. I chose this topic of study because, after spending four years as ELL administrator at Central High School, I perceived struggles that ELL students often faced in school. Rosnow (1997) suggests the idea of expectancy effect--the notion that researchers or experimenters develop pre-conceived ideas about the capacities or perspectives of the participants which can lead to experimental bias. Conversely, a number of researchers including Glesne (1999) have cautioned against cross-group research--research in which the researcher is not a member of the group that is studied. It will be the responsibility of the researcher to display objectivity, separating personal observations and beliefs from information gathered during the course of the study.

Definition of Terms

AEIS (Academic Excellence Indicator System): Texas Education Agency system of measuring and reporting schools' performance data that include daily attendance rates, performance on standardized achievement examinations, and graduation rates (Texas Education Agency Education Code 2006).

AYP: Average Yearly Progress: "No Child Left Behind" designation that sets minimum standards for student achievement and minimum student achievement gains in core subject areas. These standards must be met for schools and districts to avoid increased monitoring and incremental penalties (No Child Left Behind 2001).

Bilingual Education (Programs): State and federally supported programs of instruction for English Language Learners in grades PK-6, featuring intensive English instruction, use of first or native language to instruct in content areas, development of first language literacy, and support for ELL students' diverse cultures (Austin Independent School District Bilingual/ESOL Handbook 2005-2006).

ESL and ESOL: Synonymous terms for English as a Second Language--English Language Arts courses designed for intensive introduction in academic and functional English provided to English Language Learners during their first years of high school (AISD Bilingual/ESOL Handbook 2005-2006).

English Language Learners (ELLs): Students whose home and dominant language is not English and who demonstrate proficiency in a first language; also refers to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and English Learner (EL) students (US Department of Education 2006).

Immigrant: In education, the legal category for students formerly residing outside the United States, and who have entered US schools within the last three years (US Department of Education 2006).

LPAC Committee: State-required and campus-based Language Proficiency Assessment Committee, meeting routinely to review student language proficiency and achievement data and to make program/placement decisions. (TEA Education Code 2006).

Newcomers: Term used for English Language Learners in their first year of US school enrollment (AISD Bilingual/ESOL Handbook 2005- 2006).

Recommended Graduation Plan: Rigorous graduation plan that requires twenty-four course credits in specific academic disciplines. Beginning in spring, 2004, completion of the Recommended Graduation Plan became a requirement for the Texas Grant, which provides up to five years of free college tuition and fees for some low-income, qualifying students (TEA Education Code 2006).

RPTE: Reading Proficiency Test in English: State-required English Reading Test, administered to all Limited English Proficiency (ELL) students in Texas each spring to help determine ELL status (Texas Education Code 2006).

SDAA and SDAA II: Students with Disabilities Academic Assessments: Special achievement examinations which supplant the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) Examinations; these are administered in subject areas to some qualifying Special Education students (Texas Education Code 2006).

Sheltered English; Sheltered English Techniques: An English Language Arts curriculum and/or approach in which curricular/instructional materials are simplified and clarified using multiple references, repetition, illustration, and core concept reinforcement (Echevarria 1998).

TAAS: Texas Academic Assessment of Skills: Precursor of the TAKS Examinations. Students originally testing under TAAS and entering high school prior to the fall of 2002 must pass Exit TAAS Exams to graduate high school (TEA Education Code 2000).

TAKS: The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills: Texas' curriculum-aligned and required achievement examinations administered to students at most grade levels; designed to measure competencies in English Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (Texas Education Code 2006).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction to the study, delineation of the four research questions, possible contributions of the research, limitations of the study, purpose(s) of the study, definition of terms, the organization of the study. Chapter II reviews relevant research literature addressing the research questions.

Chapter III describes the methodology and data analysis of the study. The data analysis includes some quantitative data such as AEIS (Academic Excellence Indicator System) student achievement information, but focuses on a larger qualitative component--a single case study of the perspectives of English Language Learners and staff members from Central High School in Austin, Texas. Construction of the survey instruments and interview protocols are

discussed in this chapter, as are the sample selections, administration of the instruments, and methods of data interpretation.

Chapter IV: Central High School establishes the context of the study. This chapter includes demographic information, student performance data, and descriptions of policies and programs specific to Central High School or to Austin Independent School District. This is a fairly detailed chapter, but all portions are pertinent to understanding the issues related to the research.

The survey and interview results appear in Chapters V and VI respectively. Survey results are shown as percentages of students and staff members who express strong, neutral to moderate, or low agreement with statements regarding certain aspects of school and schooling for ELL students. Interview results are discussed by topic, and specific student and staff commentary is included in the discussion.

Chapter VII contains synthesis of the student and staff responses as they relate to the Lived Reality Model. Chapter VIII offers implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for further research. The implications are delineated by the four dimensions of student "lived reality" that this dissertation addresses. Bibliography, Vita and Appendices follow Chapter VIII; these include the research instruments.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

In this chapter, I review the current and pertinent research literature regarding each of the four aspects of "lived reality" that are reflected in the dissertation thesis. I begin by exploring the literature that regards inequity in the achievement of ELL students. I then examine the research literature that concerns the four dimensions of the school experience that this study addresses.

Literary and Information Sources

I first researched data bases using keywords related to English Language Learners and to general school success. Keywords included: Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language, dropout, extra-curricular, immigrant students, learning environments, Limited English Proficiency, literacy, minority achievement, No Child Left Behind, parent involvement, promotion, retention in grade, school climate, school culture, self-image, self-efficacy, sheltered instruction, and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. In addition, I relied on books, periodicals, and dissertations that focused on English Language Learner education.

Information provided by the Austin Independent School District and by the Texas Education Agency was also a major source of data. This included: the 2005-2006 Austin Independent School District Bilingual/ESOL Program Guide, the 2005-2006 International High School Orientation Guide, the Central High

School 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Campus Improvement Plans and the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System Campus Information Pages for 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006. Supplementary information was gained through personal interviews with key Austin Independent School District administrators and other professional personnel who had specific knowledge of Central High School ELL programs and policies. Lastly, I used the Internet to search for recent material related to these issues.

Literature Regarding Inequities for English Language Learners

Decades of research support the notion that schools have been unable to develop systems which educate all students to the high standards needed to survive in a global society (Anyon 1997; Berube 1998). Considered in the aggregate, minority student populations have achieved at even less acceptable academic levels and have often achieved below their peers. According to Crawford (1992) and Trueba (1989), the achievement gap between White students and students of color is significant, persistent, and widening. This achievement gap begins with reading deficits of about one year for ELLs and certain other minorities, then grows with each passing year, not only in Reading but in many other subject areas such as Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (Harris 2002).

Economic Inequity

Unequal achievement appears to more strongly relate to low socio-economics, race, and ethnicity than to level of parent education. Holt (1982), Oakes (1990) and Weis (1999) collectively argue that at all parent education levels, African Americans or Latino students generally post lower achievement scores in Reading and other core subject areas that do White students. In addition, poverty has historically been associated with lower achievement test scores in a number of research studies; and social class, closely associated with socio-economic status, has also been found to be a strong predictor of success on standardized achievement examinations (Clewell 1991; Comer 1998).

Demographic indicators for many school districts reflect low family income levels for an unusually high percentages of the minority students (US Bureau of the Census 2006), and immigrant students, many of whom are ELL tend to have even lower incomes (Walqui 2005). For a number of immigrant parents, not only is migration costly, but low paying jobs represent the only employment available, especially for individuals who are not English literate or have not established legal residency. Many parents of English Language Learners accept and retain low paying jobs, tying those families into lives in economically depressed neighborhoods with fewer social services and supports, higher joblessness, and higher crime. Sosa (1993) describes some neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrant families as "violent communities" which offer

little or no support for academics. Thus, the concepts of "economically disadvantaged and "at risk" are closely associated in education.

This is not to suggest that all immigrant families suffer from economic disadvantage; like all populations, there is a range of income for individuals in this demographic group. However, since many English Language Learners fall into a group not only defined by English language limited proficiency, but by poverty and its effects, they may experience greater academic struggles than mainstream students who do not confront similar obstacles (Comer 1984; Cummins 1989). According to Echevarria (1998), American educators may actually be contributing to the promulgation of unequal schooling by holding on to existing social and economic biases that cause achievement gaps to widen; students who are perceived to "have less" may be viewed as less capable and, consequently, become less accomplished in school than their peers (Fine 2004; Friere 1972; Giroux 1981; Nieto 1997).

Research suggests a strong link between ELL success and the quality of instructional programs that they are provided. The quality of instructional programs that schools provide do not, in many cases, meet the needs of minority students including English Language Learners, though exceptional "pockets of great success" exist in some school districts (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba 2004; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner 1999). Togneri & Anderson (2003) refer to these successful schools or programs as "islands of success". Historically, however, English Language Learners have performed below their English-fluent

counterparts in a number of critical academic areas because they have not acquired adequate content knowledge, literacy, and other school-related competencies they need to succeed (Matsuura & UNESCO 2004; McNeil 2000).

Low Literacy and Learning Gaps

With the challenge for schools to raise their scholarship standards comes considerable pressure for classroom teachers to guarantee equivalent academic outcomes for every student. This instructional challenge is then a student problem when English Language Learners are faced with academic tasks they cannot accomplish and with goals they cannot reach. Educators are caught in a "no win" situation. If they instruct ELL students at their performance levels, progress is probable, but reaching certain benchmarks on prescribed timelines is difficult. If teachers present on-level material without scaffolding or substantial other supports, or teach to the common or dominant needs of a particular group, struggling ELL students may have little chance of understanding or mastering information (Freeman & Freeman 2001; Krashen 1991).

Many research studies address the role that first language literacy plays in second language acquisition, and often support the contention that literacy is a requisite for student empowerment (Delgado-Gaitan 1991; Cowan 2005). ELL students that are already literate in their first language have a much greater chance of quickly developing literacy in their second language than students who are not yet literate. A problem is that far too few ELL students enter US schools with first language literacy, and since most secondary schools do not include first language

support for ELL students, their development of first language literacy often stagnates (Byrnes 2003). This is not to preclude that all ELLs are illiterate in their first language; many English Language Learners enter US schools with excellent first language knowledge. However, a unique aspect of American education is the "teaching toward testing" approach emphasizing specific linguistic skills that Newcomer students may not have experienced (Gordon & Reese 1997; Stevenson & Stigler 1991).

Literacy is also a prerequisite for advancement in other academic areas (Hemphill & Snow 1996). Hakuta (1991) identifies links between English language deficiencies of ELLs (sometimes referred to as "verbal deficits") and these students' high rates of educational failure at all levels across the curriculum. Within a very short time, students must learn a non-phonetic second language and master the four communicative modes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They must adjust and adapt to a new culture and a different educational system, and acquire highly demanding skills which require linguistic understanding such as literature that is more complex, expository language found in books, and unusual literature such as archaic forms (Hillard 1995; Lindgren 1991).

Overwhelmingly, research suggests that secondary English Language Learners enter US schools unprepared for certain curricular expectations. Bridging this gap poses tremendous challenges for schools struggling to accelerate the progress of ELL students and to address human diversity in

education (Cusher, McClelland, & Stafford 2002; Faltis 1998; Rueda 2006; Sergiovanni 2004).

Changing Demographics and School Effects

According to Mercuri (2003), the number of ELLs in schools in the United States has increased by 105% over the last ten years. In 2004, the number of English Language Learners attending US public schools exceeded five million students. Schools have not responded adequately to the needs of this growing student group, although demographic trends for ELLs have been developing for several decades. In addition, the median age for the Hispanic population in this country is just over twenty-five years of age, resulting in a comparatively high percentage of school age children (Wong-Fillmore 1998). Although the growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S. should force better educational service for Hispanic students, student data indicate that this has not occurred. Not all ELL students are Hispanic, and certainly not all Hispanic students are ELL; however, nationally--and at Central High School—Hispanic students represent the largest subgroup within the ELL student population.

The issue has become even more complex as patterns of migration among ELL students and families show substantial change (NCES 2002; 2003). While Southern states have fairly well developed Bilingual and ESOL programs, states in other areas (such as the Midwest) are just beginning to design theirs. Here, again, ELL students are being short-changed; states which have traditionally have the least experience with ELL student populations face the greatest shortage of

Bilingual and ESOL teachers (Clewell & Villegas 2001), and the fewest teachers prepared to work with this student population. Increased academic standards and heightened accountability magnify concerns that English Language Learners may continue to perform poorly unless significant strategies to ensure better education are found (Minicucci 1993).

Literature Regarding Quality of Instructional Programs for ELLs

Bilingual Education, ESOL and Sheltered Instruction

ELL programs have a wide range in design and a success rate that is equally variable. Most curricular designs for ELLs reflect one of two bodies of research: Collier (1987) and Cummins (1987). According to Collier's research, high quality language programs begin instruction in the students' first language while simultaneously teaching ESOL through meaningful academic content. According to this traditional Bilingual model, ELLs can ideally achieve full development in both languages. The Cummins research proposes two language acquisition models—the Separate Underlying Proficiency Model (SUP) and the Common Underlying Proficiency Model (CUP). Briefly summarized, the SUP model suggests that proficiency in native and second languages are developed separately, or without transfer, while the CUP Model suggests that development of proficiency in one language contributes to development of proficiency in a second language.

In secondary schools, Sheltered Instruction and ESOL (English as a Second Language) are the favored methods of delivering instruction to ELL students. In Sheltered Instruction, teachers present concepts in user-friendly formats with emphasis on illustration, demonstration, and consistent vocabulary reinforcement (Short, Hudec, & Echevarria 2002). In Sheltered Instruction, emphasis is sometimes on quality rather than quantity; for example, students might be asked to produce shorter essays which follow the same formula and format that other students use, or be given extra time to complete equivalent or modified assignments.

English as a Second Language is intense, direct instruction in spoken and written English. Although an English-only approach to learning is not widely supported in language acquisition research (Faltis 1999), Central High School must comply with district, state and federal guidelines. Because ELL students enter school with a broad range of English proficiencies and then progress at different rates, differentiated ESOL instruction helps accommodate students' multiple needs in a single classroom. Individualized Educational Plans (IEP's) have long been a concept employed for Special Education students, and some educators now suggest that English language limited proficiency represents a sometimes temporary, but nonetheless significant "disability" deserving custom instruction (Maehr, 1992; Tallal 2004).

Recruiting, Retaining and Developing Quality ELL Teachers

Educational research indicates that teacher quality is a primary key to instructional quality, and many researchers further argue that teacher quality is the strongest single predictor of student success (Monk 1994; Saunders & Rivers 1996). Research also indicates that teacher quality is not equivalent among schools, and that minority schools in particular attract and retain less qualified teachers than majority or affluent schools (Education Trust 1998; 2004). Furthermore, studies reflect that the less "White" a school population is, the lower the achievement scores of the students and the lower the credentials of the teachers are likely to be. Minority schools are found to typically employ many more teachers who are either uncertified or teaching out of field for at least a portion of the day, especially in the academic areas of Mathematics and Science; or that have failed several administrations of their states' certification examinations.

Ingersoll (2002; 2003) echoes the concern the many teachers in minority schools are not pedagogically adept, as great numbers are alternately certified and have not undergone the direct experiences of student teaching, observing other teachers, or receiving specific training necessary to teach effectively. Furthermore, the attrition curve for ill-prepared educators indicates that many leave the profession during their first three years of service (Jackson, Bolden & Fenwidk 2001). Williams (1992) suggests that the responsibility to provide high quality teachers with both instructional expertise and with knowledge of

important teacher responsibilities (such as methods of involving parents) actually rests with teacher preparation programs.

In addition to developing quality teacher preparation, teacher shortages--specifically Bilingual Education and ESOL teacher shortages--are areas of concern for ELL education. Employment statistics indicate that the supply of teachers prepared to serve this population continues to fall far short of the demand (Alexander & Fuller 2004; Chavkin 1988). Prior to the 2005-2006 school year, only 2.5% of the teachers who taught ELL students held college degrees in either Bilingual Education or English as a Second Language. As many as 45% of the nation's teachers currently have ELLs in their classrooms, yet only 12% of K-12 teachers nationwide have been provided even minimal training and preparation to address the needs of these students (Whitehurst 2002).

The contention that teacher training for those who teach ELL students is comparatively poor may indicate a low priority for training ELL teachers. Additionally, ESOL certification is often "add-on" certification that teachers pursue to increase their marketability. All of this considered, some of our nation's largest and neediest student groups are taught by the most poorly prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond 1994).

Appropriate Curriculum and Expectations

Unequal achievement is often times a product of unequal expectations stemming from assumption of unequal worth. It has taken decades to dispel the "Deficit Perspective" theory which purports that certain students' strengths,

languages, and cultures are inferior to those held by majority students (Day 1994; Delpit 1988). Although educational policies do not endorse a Deficit Perspective, many teachers neglect to draw on ELL students' backgrounds and interests because they are considered irrelevant and less valuable than those of their peers. Although English Language Learners have diverse abilities and gifts (Barkan 1991), many students in this group have experienced fragmented schooling, creating gaps between the skills they have and the skills they need. Furthermore, research reflects that the growing complexity of school curriculum can be problematic for ELLs (Cochran 1989). Problem solving using text prompts, essay composition requiring a variety of writing modes, and reading composition (particularly of unusual texts) are difficult tasks for English Language Learners. Recently arrived immigrant students--with virtually no knowledge of English--may be assigned to mainstream or monolingual English programs with teachers who are not trained to deal with the complex needs of second language learners. Teachers unfamiliar with language acquisition theories are often not illustrative, and may lack instructional innovation (Fuller 1995; Toohay 1988). Research indicates that reliance on text-only worksheets, assigning tasks that demand complex language responses, and using complicated or vague instructions are all examples of methods that confound English Language Learners (Krashen 1991).

From a socio-cultural perspective, many of these students come with a variety of backgrounds that must be addressed to guarantee educational equity. Many ELLs enroll in school with interrupted or inadequate formal education, and

few enriching experiences that directly transfer to academics (Careaga 1989). Research suggests that while English fluent students often bring experiences of reading from home and continue to receive home support for reading, many ELLs do not have this luxury. To compensate, teachers should provide text rich classrooms and utilize techniques to tie reading selections to students' backgrounds. The difficulties in accomplishing this is locating texts that are engaging while linguistically simple, and relating literature to the broad range of backgrounds teachers often have in a single classroom. Despite these needs, some teachers decline to include culturally matched books in classroom use and classroom libraries and fail to honor ELL students' stories and responses in classroom discussions (Banks 1997; Banfield 1998).

Though recent efforts have been made to incorporate varied cultures in literature anthologies and textbooks, school curricula remain for the most part reflective of majority cultures only. Due to the critical role that prior knowledge and meta-cognition play in learning, these variations affect student academic achievement if the teacher does teacher does not exercise initiative to accommodate these diverse student needs (Fu 2004; Holt 2002). However, few instructors have a large enough repertoire of strategies to adequately address the multiple learning styles of all students considered “at risk” (Brinton 1997; Brinton & Snow 1997; Carbo 1998; Gardner 1982).

Difficulty in Meeting the Needs of ELLs with Learning Disabilities

Research indicates that often ELL students with learning disabilities are sometimes not identified or served in Special Education programs, as language problems are sometimes confused with learning problems (Krashen 1993). This can continue for years as teachers wait for students to "catch up". In some cases, students can stumble through regular curriculum until high school when instructors realize that many students cannot catch up and perform with their peers without program changes such as modified instruction. For ELLs with significant learning difficulties, this response may be too late. Nonetheless, on most school campuses, ELL students are statistically over represented in Special Education programs (Harry 1997).

One-Size-Fits All Standardized Examinations for ELLs

To a large degree, schools are evaluated by standardized testing-- a major school initiative of this decade. While testing for minimum knowledge holds schools accountable to each student and to each student group, "standardizing" can result in a one-size-fits-all "cookie cutter" approach to the individual process of human learning (Heubert & Hauser 1999). Though research supports the belief that true second language mastery may take up to nine years (Carrasquillo 1991), state and federal statutes regulate or penalize school districts whose student groups do not meet certain test performance standards or who fail to graduate within a prescribed four year period.

Research suggests that separating language proficiency and subject matter proficiency is almost impossible; subject area tests often also serve as English language tests (Fuchs 1994). One strategy schools use for bolstering results for high stakes testing is including only students with a high probability of success and without a legal basis for exemption. Because schools are evaluated based primarily on TAKS scores, the practice of exempting students with a low probability of passing these exams has been a widespread practice in many schools.

Instructional design is tied closely to assessment design. Many ELL researchers concur that reliance on standardized achievement tests as absolute instruments in determining students' educational futures is unfair or even harmful for many linguistically diverse students. Since assessment tools are generally unable to separate language errors from academic errors, and since most assessments have not been normed for children whose first language is not English, standard assessment instruments may not be valid and reliable for all ELL students (Amrien & Berliner 2003).

Research reflects that English Language Learners can experience frustration when they are administered subject area examinations that contain highly specific vocabulary and require specialized literacy functions of the cognitive domain, such as writing comparative and persuasive essays, asking and answering higher order questions, making inferences, and recognizing symbolism. In addition, the high pressure and frustration generated by high-stakes testing may

even prevent English Language Learners from continuing adult education, and may consequently increase the risk of failure in working life (Orfield 1990).

Literature Regarding School Connectedness for ELLs

School Environment

Schools can be hospitable or hostile environments for students. Educational research links the nature and quality of school environment to the degree of self-efficacy, participation, and success that students experience (Cummins 1996). School environment has been defined as a broad construct consisting of many aspects that are physical, social, organizational, and ideological. Students prefer positive school environments to unpleasant surroundings, and minority students have been found to be much more successful in positive school environments that embrace diversity (Fuchs 1994). However, research also indicates that teachers unknowingly structure classrooms and instruction for majority students, not ELLs. Often, interactions for ELLs are limited by a number of means; culturally relevant materials are rarely utilized in class and structured activities do not always encourage participation. While the body of research literature clearly supports certain pedagogical options to benefit ELL students (e.g. group work and greater response opportunities), teachers often times are untrained or unable to modify classroom structure and delivery of instruction to consistently include all students.

Banks (1993) suggests that Multicultural Education—specialized curricula with culture-reflective materials and supports--is one possible approach to guaranteeing inclusiveness. Multi-cultural education is a philosophy that incorporates celebration of the multiple ethnicities and cultures in each school's population through creation of a curriculum that recognizes diversity, and further individualizes instruction within each diverse group (Sleeter 1996). The multi-cultural movement gained impetus during the "equity emphasis" of the 1990's following the "excellence logic" of the 1980's (Leland & Harste 1994), however, mainstream texts and resources for most schools have not incorporated this notion to any great degree. Research reflects that most textbooks still portray minority persons in menial or secondary roles, and still contain gender bias regarding professions and social status. Proponents of multi-cultural education suggest that true mulit-cultural education requires transforming school culture to celebrate differences (Maehr 1996).

School Bonds

School climate and its impact on student success endure as popular research areas. School connectedness--defined as a sense of belonging, attachment, and affiliation--has tremendous impact on the overall climate of the school. Much research into students' happiness or unhappiness in school relates to school bonding—"buying in" to the educational system as a meaningful and enjoyable endeavor (Epstein 1992; McCombs & Whistler 1997). The school is perceived as the primary path for development of school bonding, and either does

or does not create this bond. Inconsistent teachers and poor school performance can interrupt the formation of school bonds, causing students to feel alienated and to view the school as impersonal.

Researchers have also noted that English Language Learners who feel their cultural group or self-identity is being threatened in any way in the language learning process can experience language anxiety and face a high risk of adjustment problems (Tse 2001). Students who withdraw from social interactions may fail to develop essential social skills, and appear predisposed to higher incidences of delinquency, dropout, and a greater incidence of mental disorders in later years. Thus, problems of social adjustment in school can result in more severe problems in adulthood (Rumberger 2004; Strain 1990).

Systematic Alienation through Separation or Tracking

Many researchers suggest that schools are not always inclined to support cultural diversity as it impacts instruction (Eagle 1989; Paulu 1995). Minority or culturally diverse students may experience alienation or even anger if they are perceived to possess lower than desired academic capabilities, or are arbitrarily placed in remedial programs with little opportunity to rejoin their peers. Tracking, the policy of separating low-achievers from high achievers for single classes or courses of study, has been found to over-represent minority students including English Language Learners (Rumberger & Rodriguez 2002). Research also indicates that lower-tracked students are often students of lower socio-economic status, minority ethnicity, or are male. Special populations such as

Special Education students and ELLs are also among the student groups most often "tracked" (Oakes 1990; 1992). Furthermore, tracking is not only a temporary placement; it becomes a permanent graduation pathway.

Parental Involvement for ELL Students

Studies of parental involvement in school suggest a strong correlation between school to parent communication and parent involvement in school (Henderson 1987). If schools initiate and sustain the communication process, parents generally respond by participating in meaningful ways. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) reported that parents often times feel they are left out of the decision making processes because the schools' interactions with them are limited to symbolic acts such as seeking their endorsement of paperwork or supplying non-academic information for the school. Chavkin (1995) further suggests that schools use the concept of parent partnership in a limited way to refer to the role parents play in being the students' first educators, and once students enter the education system, the schools take over omniscient roles, actually considering the parents to be more of a "problem" than a resource. In these situations, minority parents are often compromised by schools' limited views of partnership possibilities with them. Other factors can influence parents' inclination to partner with schools. According to Scribner & Young (1995), parents make choices whether or not to partner with schools, and these choices are often times economically influenced.

Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) delineated reasons that minority parents often do not participate actively in their children's schooling process, many of which reflect economic struggles:

1. They do not have enough time.
2. They do not believe that they have anything to contribute.
3. They do not know what is going on, and they do not know the system.
4. They cannot arrange for childcare.
5. They are not available during the time of school functions.
6. They do not have transportation.
7. They do not believe they are welcome in school.

For Newcomer of first year ELL students, parent involvement has been found to be even lower than ELL parent involvement taken as a whole, illustrating the compounded disadvantages that Newcomer ELL students may face. For many ELL students, two-way communication between home and school does not consistently occur; parents remain virtually uninformed, and students struggle unassisted. Scribner, Young, & Pedroza (1999) performed a study of high-performing Hispanic schools (many of whose students were ELL), and found that those successful schools made parental involvement meaningful by their focus on collaboration, and by their consideration of family cultural values. High achievement and parental involvement have been the focus of other research studies which concluded that positive school/parent relations aid in higher school achievement and result in positive student attitudes toward school (Hiatt 1994).

In spite of multiple studies that show positive effects of parent/school programs, research contends that many parent education programs evolve around a focus on parent actions, parent "trainings", or other top-down approaches that do not consider parents in any egalitarian ways (Boyer, 2001). In addition, research indicates that ELL parents often tend to revere or trust the school organization, rather than to challenge it (Manno 1991). Villanueva & Hubbard (1994) describe parent involvement of minority students as often almost "invisible".

Literature Regarding Self-Image and Self-Efficacy for ELLs

Interaction

Research suggests that many English Language Learners stay within their social construct much of the time, without significantly merging with the larger student population. There are strong benefits to this unity which include communication and support, but a noted drawback of this practice is that second languages are mastered less easily when used infrequently (Krashen 1990; 1996). Research also supports the idea that languages are best acquired in informal settings. Student self-image improves with consistent and varied interaction, and student self-efficacy best develops when students move outside their "comfort zones" to explore and experience relationships in the larger school environment.

Research also indicates that ELL students often feel less welcomed by their English fluent peers and teachers, and that feelings of non-acceptance can

undermine long-term classroom success. Researchers further endorse the concept that affective factors such as comfort level contribute more to language acquisition than do cognitive skills (Gardner 1982). According to Rex (2002; 2003), affective or psychological factors such as motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-esteem help determine how language acquisition and communication take place; in order to want to speak, students must feel that that they will be heard.

Teachers often underestimate ELL students' abilities to participate in class, assuming that they "do not have enough English" to participate. Students may instead have significant ideas to contribute and be waiting on an opportunity to voice them. What some teachers also fail to realize or act upon is that the most significant resource in the classroom may not be the instructor; the greatest resource may be the social interactions that teachers can carefully design (Collier 2002).

A Socio-Psychological Framework

Gardner (1985) established a socio-psychological framework (socio-educational model) delineating the role of attitudes and motivation in second language learning as measured via the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Much of the research regarding the roles of attitudes and motivation in second language learning has made use of the AMTB, or tests derived from it. A great majority of second language acquisition research confirms the notion that attitudes can act as barriers or bridges to learning a new language, and are “the essential environmental ingredients” for other learning as well. Gardner further

purports that learning can only happen if certain affective conditions such as self-confidence and low anxiety exist. For English Language Learners, this has implications not only for learning a second language, but for learning in all content areas.

Language experts suggest that schools should institute programs incorporating native language for social and academic interaction as well as for fostering positive self-esteem and identity formation for ELL students (Krashen 1990; 1996). Despite research demonstrating the critical role of native language in facilitating the academic success of ELL students, the learning environments in most classrooms emphasize English immersion. In these environments, use of native languages among ELL students is discouraged or prohibited. Suppression of native languages for ELLs in such ways has been attributed to teacher ideologies of assimilation as well as to misinformation and misperceptions commonly held among teachers regarding ELL education and second language acquisition (Fu 2004).

Literature Regarding Ongoing Progress for ELL Students

The Debate over Retention and Social Promotion

Much research suggests that the prevalent practices of reliance on quantitative measurements of student performance, and the adherence to rigid guidelines for advancement can discourage students by impeding their progress toward graduation. Social promotion and retention research do not widely

support the view that grade retention is an effective tool for educational improvement, nor that it is beneficial to students. In fact, the literature suggests that retention offers little or no academic benefits, and that it can actually harm the retained child by creating an unnecessary amount of psychological stress or embarrassment and possibly leading to school drop out in later years ((Poza 1999; Rumberger 2004; Rumberger & Palardy 2005).

Research also addresses the notion that retention in grade presumably helps retained students "catch up" with their peers. There is wide spread support for the practice of retention in grade as a vehicle to promote academic excellence and as a tool for students to academically, psychologically, or emotionally "catch up" to their peers with respect to assumptions about child development and grade readiness. Although the idea of "catching up" may apply more to elementary age students than secondary students, many practitioners support the concept of granting "the gift of time", by allowing students additional years to complete single year courses or single year course work (Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple 2002).

Because retention "appears" to be immediately effective for some students, many teachers generalize from this practical knowledge, without considering whether or not students would have academically and socially "caught up" to their peers had retention not taken place or had other alternatives been sought (Roderick 1995). They also fail to take into account a student's prior exposure to the same course content as a factor that mediates some students' apparent

"mastery" of the subject matter in the retained year. Research clearly indicates that factors such as teaching approaches determine whether repeating a course is beneficial, harmful, or just a waste of time. The fallacious either/or argument between the choice between retention in grade and social promotion completely ignores a third possibility of interventions that researchers suggest might be key in producing new outcomes for struggling students (Haberman 1995; Paulu 1995).

Overwhelmingly, the body of literature suggests that retention is selective– related to certain types of students. Oakes (1992) reports inequitably high retention rates among people of color, individuals who have low socio-economic status, and males. Rumberger & Thomas (2002) found that children from low socio-economic backgrounds had higher incidents of school enrollment or placement below their expected grade levels. Taken as a whole, the body of research on retention in grade has strong implications for the educational treatment of English Language Learners.

The Link between Grade Retention and School Drop Out

Certainly, factors other than the prospect or promise of graduation keep students in school. Yet, retention in grade has been associated with a number of academic and psychological factors that make retained students more likely to have further educational problems. The most significant ramification of retention is that retained students are more likely to drop out of school (Blue & Cook 2004). To date, one of the most definitive studies of this association is the Rumberger (1995) study which identifies grade retention as the single, most

powerful predictor of dropping out of school. The literature on retention additionally argues that retention policies may actually promote social, economic, and political problems that include increased joblessness, crime, welfare dependence, and a lack of moral responsibility. Each year, over 3,000,000 children enter public educational systems in this country. Of those 3,000,000 students, almost one third are not predicted to complete high school based on the current national dropout rate (US Department of Education 2006).

Summary of the Research Literature

Overwhelmingly, research literature endorses the idea that achievement gaps persist for many minority students including English Language Learners. Though the ELL population is not a homogeneous group of students by any means, social delineators such as poverty and class discrimination contribute to struggles that a great number of ELLs encounter. In addition, many ELLs have low first language literacy levels or other learning gaps. Increasingly, US schools are currently experiencing a rapidly growing ELL population that institutions seem unable to serve equitably.

Research also indicates that some designs for ELL education bring better results than others, and that many teachers presently instructing ELLs are ill-equipped to provide their students with successful learning experiences. Research also reflects that parent participation levels for ELL students are lower than participation levels for their English fluent counterparts for a number of

reasons, some of which are influenced by the school. Research further suggests that second language acquisition, content area learning, and general student satisfaction can be facilitated by certain instructional systems that schools put in place (Banks 1997; Hilliard 1995). Finally, research reflects a close association between student failure in class, student retention in grade, and school dropout.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

In this chapter, I first review the ELL Lived Reality Theory and Model on which this research study is premised. Next, I discuss the methodology used in the study--the quantitative portion and the larger qualitative component. I divide the chapter into three research phases: Phase One involves the planning steps, construction of the research instruments, establishing reliability of these instruments, reviewing student achievement data, examining policy documents, and establishing rapport on the campus. Phase Two entails selection of the survey and interview samples and discussion of the survey and interview administration processes. Phase Three concerns the methods used to calculate the survey results and to interpret the interview responses.

The ELL Lived Reality Theory and Model

The theory of this study consists of a series of four hypotheses that are linked:

- There exists a distinct lived reality or school experience for English Language Learners at Central High School.
- This reality includes four dimensions of the school experience for ELL students: quality of the instructional programs, degree of school connectedness, self-image and self-efficacy, and ongoing progress toward academic and related goals.
- The ELL students themselves and the staff members that work closely with them have perceptions regarding these dimensions. The intersection of the two perspective sets represents a "shared reality" for the two

groups, and the incongruence between the two perspective sets represents experiences or views exclusive to one group or the other.

- While items that lie within the shared reality confirm strengths and challenges for Central High School's ELL programs, exclusive views may represent new or surprising opportunities for growth.

The research model for this study is shown in Figure 1 in the form of a Venn diagram. The perspective set of the ELL students is represented by the circle on the left, and the perspective set for staff members is represented as the circle on the right hand side. The student perspectives appear in the left-hand circle because this study has a student focus. The shaded, central area of overlap represents a "shared reality"--perceptions that students and staff members agree upon, and the crescent shaped areas to the left or right of the shaded central area represent perspectives exclusive to either group. The size of each area does not necessarily correspond with the size of each perspective set. The boxes below the diagram contain possible implications from the "exclusive reality" crescents.

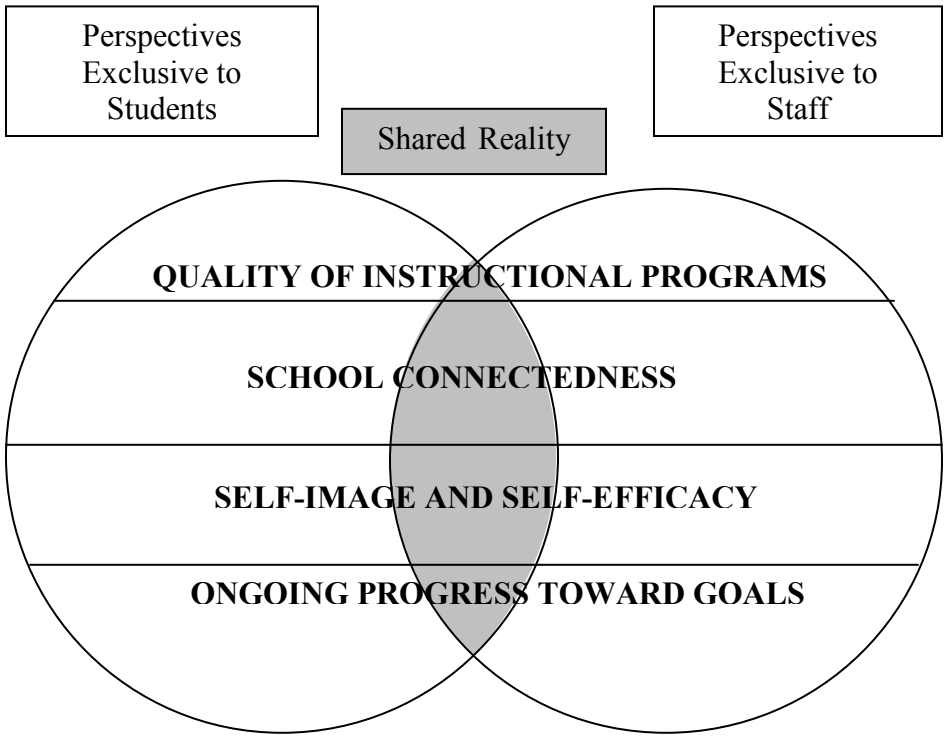
If the students and staff members express common views, this theory suggests that there are some confirmed strengths and areas of growth for Central High School's ELL education. Agreed upon strengths should be celebrated and maintained, while agreed upon areas for growth should be addressed quickly and conscientiously. If the students express one view, and staff members express another, however, this theory purports that either the ELL students or the staff members misperceive one another, or are unaware of certain things, and that this

incongruence could also yield important information. Within the Venn diagram, the circles are delineated into four quadrants, each of which represents one dimension of the "ELL Lived Reality". The sections appear proportionate, but their sizes may not represent the relative importance of each dimension. In addition, this theory does not contend that these dimensions occur or are developed in a set order, or relate in definitive ways.

Themes relevant to each quadrant emerged from the following research sources:

- Professional experience,
- Literature review,
- Examination of campus and district level documents,
- Review of student achievement data provided by the Texas Education Agency,
- Conversations with district and campus leaders,
- Student and staff surveys, and
- Student and staff interviews.

Figure 1: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Perspectives of Students and Staff



A Blend of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

This is a qualitative study, but includes some quantitative data—specifically student achievement data obtained from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System Campus Information Pages which include TAKS scores and graduation rates. The purpose of including these statistics is to frame and support the study, rather than to analyze the statistical data per se. The surveys were conducted to broaden the over-all study participation, and to support the qualitative component of the research. Many students and staff members who participated in the interviews did so because they had "previewed" the study through the survey process, and they were interested enough to proceed.

The survey instruments themselves combine quantitative and qualitative elements. One quantitative aspect is the use of the Mathematical Likert scale for measuring degrees of agreement or non-agreement with statements that relate to the research questions; the other is the method by which the survey results are calculated and interpreted; they are interpreted as percentages of students and staff members who express strong agreement, neutrality or moderate agreement, or low agreement with each statement. By using percentages of agreement, it was possible to easily compare and communicate the responses of students and staff.

While student performance measures such as achievement exams gauge skills and knowledge, they do not explain why students engage, participate, and achieve as they do; nor do they often reflect what skill sets ELL students bring with them or precisely what the school organization is doing to systematically

prepare students for future success. Achievement statistics--while revealing--do not "paint" the total picture of what is happening in schools to and for students. With this in mind, the primary focus of this research is to gather personal and useful information from individual ELL students and staff members.

This study employs the traditional research methods of survey and interview (Glazer & Strauss), but includes a critical theory dimension. The study group (English Language Learners) represents an ethnic and cultural minority in Central High School. In addition, most of these students also belong to another minority—students of Immigrant status. Furthermore, many of these same students are economically disadvantaged. Research reflects that minority status often arbitrarily signals or determines social class, and results in certain types of treatment and restriction of opportunities. Particularly in the case of "minority poor" students, academic achievement is often depressed and social power is reduced (Young 1997). However, the purpose of this research is to arrive at a lived reality for ELL students--not to lament social injustice. Therefore, the survey instruments are as objective and focused on the four research questions as possible, rather than open-ended or aimed to elicit information not directly related to the schooling experience.

Phase One

Construction of the Survey Instruments

Light & Pillomer (1984) emphasize the importance of constructing questions pinpointing the essential information. Therefore, the most difficult task in constructing the survey and interview instruments was "getting at" the four factors or dimensions that this research study is premised on. In examining the research literature, certain aspects of each dimension emerged. For example, in the area of quality of instructional programs, high teacher quality, good program design, and effective teaching materials emerged as integral ingredients present in most successful schools. To help determine the validity of the statements and questions, fellow educators were consulted, and their input helped formulate and refine questions or statements that addressed the target areas by "getting at" the critical attributes of each. Ultimately, the instruments were balanced with three statements or questions included for each critical aspect.

Separating variables such as extra-curricular involvement and parent involvement was not difficult as these are discreet activities or inputs, but separating the effects of some variables posed a greater challenge and was more subjective. Becker (1990) stresses the difficulty that researchers encounter in identifying just which variables are significant and to what degree each is important, stating that "when two or more variables combine in a way that their effects may not be separated, a confounding of those variables has occurred". Becker cites the example of the relationships between student performance and

instructional enthusiasm, alertness of students, and other factors that students "bring to the table" such as innate intelligence and prior learning. Hopefully, these survey and interview instruments were successful in isolating the target variables as much as possible.

According to Bordens (2005), students must perceive a survey instrument as valid so they do not develop negative attitudes regarding its usefulness; therefore, respect for the survey instrument is important in the success of the survey administration. Both the survey instruments and the interview protocols consist of questions or statements directly related to students' lives in the school environment, focusing on the effects school-based influences might have on how the students feel, behave, and perform. The research instruments were also designed to gather enough first hand information to create a composite picture of the English Language Learner experience. In the first half of the survey, three statements of agreement or non-agreement concern each of the target dimensions, and the second portion of the survey restates the original phrases in other forms, as a validity measure.

Brown (1998) suggests that participants may not always know exactly what the researcher is looking for, and that using Likert-type rating scales can increase the risk of misclassifying answers. He suggests assigning point values from at least "1" to "5" to represent a response range from non-agreement to complete agreement. He also endorses the use of "anchors", written cues that remind respondents how the Likert values function. In total, these surveys consist

of twenty-four statements of agreement or non-agreement to be rated using a Likert scale with assigned values of from "1" to "6", with "5" and "6" signifying strongest agreement, "3" and "4" indicating neutral or moderate agreement, and "1" or "2" representing lowest agreement.

Care was taken to design important questions that would interest participants and yield valuable information. According to Peshkin (1990) questions are deemed important if answering them will clarify relationships and variables known to affect the behavioral system under study, if the answers can support any one of the hypotheses or competing views, or if the answers lead to potential practical application. Thus, survey statements such as "Teachers here listen to students", and "This school offers many opportunities for students." are assertions that represent significant areas of interest, and issues that are relevant to school success; therefore, these are worthy survey items.

Peshkin also describe questions which are considered poor. These questions have answers already firmly established, contain variables that are known to have little effect on the behavior of interest, or should not be included because there is no reason to believe the variables in question are casually related. With this in mind, survey and interview items were carefully selected to meet the criteria for good questions, and avoid the characteristics of bad questions.

Researchers suggest logic in protocol to simplify the research instrument for respondents (Patton 2002). For example, grouping statements or questions

with a logical progression allows the respondent to think in certain realms without having to vacillate between concepts. Care was also taken, however, to structure the protocols with some degree of variation, so that the respondent could not guess what the expected or desired response was. The Spanish version of the student survey instrument was trans-adapted rather than translated--refined to reflect the essence of the English instrument, while taking care to pose questions politely and with neutral language (Marin & Marin 1991). The staff survey instrument was designed with the same content as the student questionnaires, but items were posited from the staff members' points of view. Care was taken to verify that the essence of statements posed to students was identical to the essence of questions for staff members. The student and staff survey instruments appear in Appendices I, II, and III.

Construction of the Interview Protocols

The interview questions were designed to elicit a broad range of detailed responses, lending depth to the information that ELL students and staff members furnished in the surveys. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend open-ended questions to ensure neutrality, and following this guideline, probes were added to each basic question. Just as the survey instruments addressed four dimensions of the lived experience of Central High School's ELL students, the interview protocols concerned these same areas, containing three questions representing each dimension. The thirteenth question related to a different, but important dimension of school success; the variation of academic accomplishment among

English Language Learners. The final question was an open-ended appeal for any additional information that interviewees would like to add.

Researchers suggest that respondents favor surveys and interviews that begin with specific questions or statements, and then move to general ones (Patton, 1992). Therefore, as a means to secure and hold participants' interest early on, the more guided or straight-forward questions comprised the first portions of the interview questionnaires, and the open-ended questions were included in the latter portions. As with the survey instrument, the language of the Spanish version of the interview protocol was trans-adapted carefully. The staff interview protocol was designed with the same content as the student questionnaires, but contained questions stated from the staff members' points of view; care was taken to verify that the essence of questions for students was the same as the essence of questions posed to staff members. Student and staff interview protocols appear in Appendices IV, V, and VI.

Reliability of the Research Instruments

Establishing reliability of the research instruments required careful construction. These recommendations by Patton (2002) were followed:

- Increasing the number of response items,
- Standardizing the administration procedures that include timing and providing instructions to participants,
- Scoring carefully, and
- Providing clear, well-written items appropriate to the sample.

There was no opportunity to test the survey's reliability by using a test-retest method. Students' perceptions might well change during the interim between test administrations, and re-assembling the students would disrupt their instructional day for a second time. However, reliability of the survey instrument was established by employing the Kuder-Richardson formula (Cohen, Swerdlik, & Phillips 1996) of doubling the number of items, with each portion representing the same information set; then checking responses for the first half of the instrument against responses for the second portion. Opposite or conflicting responses were noted but not calculated in the response tallies. Students and staff members were advised that respondents could skip survey or interview items if they were unsure of those statements' intended meanings, or if the participants were uncertain of their own personal perspectives or experiences.

Much of the demographic information that participants were asked to supply was intended to serve as predictor variables. For students, these included grade level, age, gender, and course enrolled in; for staff members, these included teaching assignment and years of experience. Since some students and staff members chose not to furnish this personal information, responses were calculated based on responses by each group as a whole, rather than by relying on partial information which might lead to faulty assumptions regarding any single subgroups such as ninth grade ELL students or first year teachers. However, since retention in grade and over age status are addressed specifically in the study,

retention status and over age were included in the content of separate response items.

Two particular demographics that might yield especially valuable information regarding ELL perspectives are gender and age. What Central High School provides for male students might not be equivalent to what is provided for females, as educational research supports the view that often male and female students face unequal academic expectations, and may receive different treatment in school. Age and maturity could also affect the experiences that ELL students have in school. Thus, characteristics of male ELL students (for example) might be more a function of maleness or of age than of ELL status.

For the staff group, teaching assignment and years of experience could yield important information. Level of teaching experience has been linked to academic outcomes in a number of research studies. There may be important differences in what individual academic departments are providing for ELL students, and differences in the ways in which novice and experienced teachers perceive and approach ELLs. Performing logistic regressions or using other more sophisticated methods to identify and analyze associations with any such factors could be very useful in further research.

Care was taken to clearly define the study topics and then to produce results that should not be confusing or difficult to interpret. Research guides suggest that lengthy questionnaires can overburden and discourage participants, yet research also suggests that increasing the number of questions or statements

improves the validity of the instrument (Glesne 1990). Therefore, the surveys were carefully structured to elicit as much critical information as possible within an administration time of about twenty minutes. The four reliability criteria prescribed by Brown (2000) were also applied to the interview protocols. Interview protocols were designed with an administration time of about one hour. To increase validity of these instruments, prompts were utilized or questions repeated if there appeared to be confusion or lack of understanding on the part of the respondent.

Establishing Rapport

My first step in beginning the on-campus research process was meeting with the campus Principal to discuss with him the purpose of my research, the research plan that I proposed to use, and the possible benefits and risks for Central High School. The building Principal (referred to in the study as Mr. Guerrero) was just competing his second year as Principal of Central High School, and had already experienced some campus achievement gains in many areas as indicated by TAKS scores and improved attendance rates. He, too, was concerned that ELL students had not yet reached equitable academic achievement levels, and graciously extended full campus access for the research.

Once Principal Guerrero had endorsed my plan and shared some campus goals with me, I conferred with the campus department chair for English as a Second Language (referred to in the study as Ms. Oliphant) to further develop my logistical schema and research timeline. With her specific knowledge and her

relationships with ELL students and their parents, she would prove an excellent associate for the research effort.

Examining Data and Documents

During the period from January to April, I conducted portions of the research that did not involve the students directly. These included review of the 2005-2006 AISD Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Handbook, the AISD International High School Orientation Guide, and the Central High School Campus Improvement Plans for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. Patton (1990) stresses the importance of triangulating information in research, and examining the content of these multiple documents served this purpose.

During this same period, the Spanish versions of the survey and interview protocols were revised under the advisement of the school district. During this time, I was also able to conduct several visits to campus and district locations to converse with key school personnel concerning background data. I held critical conversations with several campus leaders, the Assistant Coordinator for Bilingual and ESOL Education for AISD, and the Principal and Curriculum Coordinator for AISD's International High School.

During these months, I also reviewed student performance data published in the AEIS (Academic Excellence Indicator System) Campus Information Pages from the Texas Education Agency. Highlights from these AEIS statistics for 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 appear in Chapter IV.

Determining the Student Sample

Once approved by the school district, I visited ESOL classes, introduced my research to the students, and distributed Consent to Participate forms written in English and Spanish. Many of the ELL students already knew me from my tenure at Central High School, which ended about two years before. Glesne (1999) states that researchers who are "insiders" have more equalized power with the research participants during the research process that "outsiders" might possess; therefore, being an "insider" may have boosted participation in this study. Because not all ESOL students were present for the initial group presentations, the ESOL teaching team graciously distributed research packets. They were also able to recruit students that I would have had difficulty identifying and contacting; they encouraged students to support the research effort, and collected and compiled the completed Consent to Participate forms.

The student survey and interview sample groups represented cross-sections of the English Language Learners at Central High School, and included first, second and third-year ESOL students as well as ELL students who had completed ESOL coursework; the groups also included both genders. While the perspectives of Newcomer students would reveal what school life is like for those ELL students who may have the most critical academic obstacles to surmount, the perspectives of veteran students should show effects of enrollment in Central High School education programs that accrue over time.

Research warns against too-large or unrepresentative data samples that can in erroneous derivation of sample characteristics known as "sampling error" (Miles & Huberman 1994). Given the great range of responses that the surveys might yield, I chose to accept the risk: benefit ratio of accepting the largest sample group that I could recruit. Ultimately, forty students completed the survey and twenty students participating in one-on-one interviews. A large majority of the survey participants (approximately 80%) chose the Spanish version of the survey instruments. For the interviews, twelve students chose to interview in Spanish, while eight chose to interview in English. The survey group consisted of twenty-four males and sixteen females, while the interview group was comprised of twelve males and eight females. Since students were given the opportunity to participate in a single component or in both portions of the study, the combined (survey and interview) participation consisted of forty-eight ELL students.

Cluster sampling was selected as a means to make the initial survey process manageable, and to avoid excluding individual students in front of their classmates. Cluster sampling would also provide a delineation of students by course level. If course level matters--in how students perceive school-- then disaggregation of the data would be easier if the surveys were separated in this way. Another benefit to cluster sampling (Hubbard & Power 2003) was that participants could collectively ask the administrator questions regarding survey procedures or meaning of specific survey items.

Determining the Staff Sample

With the student group, ESOL teachers acted as the intermediaries, petitioning students to participate, talking with parents, and collecting the consent forms for the research. Staff members were offered the opportunity to participate, but were not as actively recruited. Twenty staff members completed the survey, and ten staff members participated in the individual interviews. Because subjects were allowed to participate in a single part of the study or in both portions, the total sample size for staff members was twenty-six.

Among those staff members interviewed were: one guidance counselor, the administrative director for the International Welcome Center, three department chairs (who were also classroom teachers), four classroom teachers, and one teaching assistant. The median experience level for staff members was fifteen years, and two of the interviewees had over thirty years of teaching experience—all at Central High School. Because of their experience and expertise, the interviewees provided "information rich" interview responses (Patton 1990).

As in the case of student recruits, staff members were made to feel that the study was worthy of their participation through consistent and clear communication of the research purpose and adherence to the following guidelines recommended by Rosnow (1993):

- Make the appeal as interesting and non-threatening as possible,
- Explicitly state the theoretical and practical importance of the theory,
- Provide pay or courtesy gifts as motivators,

- Arrange for requests to participate to be made by high-status persons, particularly women,
- Avoid stressful tasks for the respondents, and
- Share the results with the participants.

Phase Two: Administration of the Surveys and Interviews

Timetable

Originally, I had planned to begin the survey and interview processes in February. Due to the district's testing schedule and to complications in getting Spanish versions of the research instruments approved by the district, the live research could not begin until May. An advantage to conducting the study later in the spring was that second semester enrollees had more experiences and observations that could be included in their responses; students knew their first semester grades and their grade level status, and were generally aware of their May or August graduation probabilities. Extending the research interactions into the summer or fall sessions would have changed the composition of the samples and the nature of the programs in place for students.

Another research adjustment involved scheduling surveys and interviews during the school day rather than outside of the school day. At Central High School, many ELL students do not live in the immediate school neighborhood, nor do they utilize private transportation for school; others face outside responsibilities that limit their availability for after school or week-end interview sessions. In addition, a great number of ELL students ride school buses which

arrive just prior to the morning bell and depart at dismissal. For these reasons, teachers were amenable to the research being conducted during school hours, so long as instruction was not compromised.

Sources of Bias

Research supports the idea that enlisting volunteers automatically creates some bias, as volunteers differ from non-volunteers in several important ways. According to Rosnow (1993), volunteer participants tend to be more educated, of higher social class, more intelligent, possessing a higher need for approval, and more sociable than non-participants. Given that volunteering is generally not random, and that some Newcomer students may not have been comfortable participating in an unfamiliar process, including only volunteers could have been a significant factor. It is possible that a vocal minority within the English Language Learner population was represented in the personal interviews.

Another possible source of bias in the student survey and interview process was the use of only two languages. Although the greatest percentage of Central High School ELLs are Spanish speakers, approximately one tenth of the ELL students speak a different first language. Use of a translator might have increased participation for some students who preferred neither English nor Spanish, but might have reduced the reliability of the research instrument if meaning were altered in translation or interpretation.

There were no overt or obvious barriers to prevent any interested staff members from participating. However, there existed a previous work relationship

between the researcher and some veteran teachers. Hopefully, this served to benefit the research effort by raising staff interest and trust.

Administering the Student Surveys and Interviews

The surveys were administered in ESOL classrooms on two consecutive days in mid-May. Students were asked to choose the survey form written in the language that they preferred. Instructions on the survey and interview documents were written in the same language as the documents, and oral instructions were given in Spanish and English. Students absent on administration days--or those that submitted Consent to Participate forms after the two- day window--were administered the surveys individually when the interviews were conducted. Students were given as much time as needed to complete their tasks, then their survey documents were labeled according to course level (class) such as ESOL II or Newcomer ESOL I.

Administering the Student Interviews

Student interviews were conducted on the cafeteria stage before school, after school, and during lunch beginning on the day after survey administration. Students were given the opportunity to interview in English or in Spanish. The interview questions were closely aligned with the survey items, but probes and prompts such as, "Tell me more about…", and "Could you give me examples of…?" were utilized to gain more specific information from general responses. Some responses deviated from the direct questions asked, but provided interesting or important information.

Administering the Staff Surveys and Interviews

The staff surveys were administered on two consecutive days in group settings, and then administered individually for participants that could not attend the group sessions. Nine of the ten interviewees chose to be interviewed in their own classrooms before school, after school or during their conference periods. Interviewing teachers and other staff members in their own working environments augmented the information they were able to provide, as they could actually share classroom examples of what student use, do, and produce daily. As with the student prompts, the questions for staff members was supplemented with probes when respondents appeared to want further elaboration.

Phase Three: Interpreting the Results

Calculating the Survey Responses

Survey responses were recorded and calculated manually. Data summary sheets were used to transfer responses from the survey forms to spreadsheets organized with columns and rows for responses to each question. A stacked format was then used to assemble the responses. After entering the data, each column and line was checked for errors in transcription, and responses were then grouped by ratings of "1" and "2" (Low Agreement), "3" and "4" (Neutrality or Moderate Agreement), and "5" and "6" (Strong Agreement). The survey responses (delineated into these three levels) are included in Chapter V of this dissertation in Table VII: Student and Staff Survey Results.

Transcribing the Interview Tapes

Selecting a large data sample poses benefits and burdens. Compounding the complexity of this study—but enhancing its results- was the bilingual nature of the student sample. Survey responses were not difficult to tabulate and interpret, but interview responses were at times. Students who chose to interview in Spanish were from a variety of countries including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico, and different language variations required careful listening and recording, as well as detailed translation. Mead (1973) strongly recommends tape recording interviews to ensure accurate recording and reporting of responses. Accordingly, student tapes were transcribed immediately after the interviews were completed, and interview tapes from staff members were transcribed following transcription of the student tapes.

Coding the Interview Responses

Upon conclusion of the interviews, each student's and staff member's responses were coded by anticipated response categories, adding new categories that emerged from their commentary. Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend an "open coding" method whereby probable categories are established in the initial stages of the research, and are adjusted as the research progresses and begins to yield results. Just as the statements and questions in the surveys and interviews were extracted from several sources that included research literature, relevant school documents and student performance data, the probable response themes

were developed in the same way. Listening to verbal responses personally--then again during transcription--was instrumental in expanding responses categories.

The interview responses are presented and discussed in Chapter VI. They include direct commentary from ELL students and staff members as an integral part of the chapter, as it was impossible to paraphrase the essence of responses without losing some degree of voice or passion. Respondents in both groups sometimes suggested certain perspectives without overtly stating them, and in some instances, individuals with seemingly similar experiences had strikingly different things to say. To facilitate understanding by the reader, student responses are presented in this dissertation in English only, and responses that have been translated from Spanish appear in parentheses.

Comparing the Responses

A final step in analyzing the research findings was comparing the survey and interview responses of ELL students with the responses of staff members. The commonalities among or differences between perspectives were then applied to the English Language Learner Lived Reality Model, and these appear in Chapter VII of the dissertation. Campus and district level documents, along with student achievement data, triangulate and verify findings that the research suggests. These are interspersed through the dissertation and included in the Recommendations section in Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER IV: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Overview

In this chapter, I establish the context of the study. I explore policies, programs, and conditions that affect English Language Learners in one urban high school. Some of these are standard for the school district, some are exclusive to the campus, and some are specific to certain programs or experiences that affect ELL students on this campus. For the purpose of confidentiality, the campus is identified as Central High School. This is a detailed chapter with many topics—all essential to frame the research study.

Demographics of Central High School

Central High School is an urban high school of approximately 1,750 students located in a north central residential neighborhood of Austin, Texas. The school attendance area is framed by commercial business zones and major highway interchanges. Among Austin's public high schools, Central High is one of the most diverse, boasting the school district's largest number of students identified as Limited English Proficient, or English Language Learner. Current figures reflect ELL enrollment as comprising close to forty percent of the total school population at Central High School. Roughly one third of this group is also classified as "Immigrant", students who previously resided outside the United States, and recently entered US schools.

The growth of Central High School's ELL enrollment is consistent with demographic trends in the South and Southwestern United States (TEA AEIS CIP 2006). But, just why Central High receives the greatest concentration of ELL enrollees within the city is speculative. Little demographic information has been collected as to why families move into this particular attendance zone or seek to enroll their children in Central High School. School enrollment personnel suggest that some reasons for high ELL enrollment at Central High School include relatively affordable housing, job opportunities for skilled and unskilled laborers, and a community characterized by diversity. They further suggest that many families choose to relocate in the area contingent upon the presence of friends or relatives who already live here.

TAKS Performance of ELL Students at Central High School

For the 2005-2006 school year, Central High School was among many schools across the nation that barely met AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) marks for success on its state-sanctioned standardized achievement measure: The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Examinations. "AYP" and "In need of improvement" are both concepts contained in 2001's No Child Left Behind federal statute, the sweeping rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This law sets minimum passing, participation, and student growth standards for every accredited educational institution that serves students in grades K-12.

Considering the fact that "passing" status is determined by true student examination scores of between forty and sixty percent, schools that miss passing marks often times have more students failing than passing. Such is the case at Central High School, where for the past three years ELL students have demonstrated a TAKS passing rate over 50% lower than the passing rates for the general school population in every grade level on every examination. Tables I-VI: TAKS Achievement of ELL Students as Compared to Campus Achievement displays portions of student performance data published in the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System Campus Information Pages:

Table I: Academic Excellence Indicator System: TAKS Grade 9
Source: Texas Education Agency

TAKS Standard Met Grade 9

	2004		2005		2006	
	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL
Reading	48%	13%	60%	22%	69%	36%
Mathematics	23%	5%	33%	15%	30%	11%
All Tests	21%	2%	31%	9%	31%	9%

Ninth Grade TAKS Examinations

For 2003-2004, Central High School ninth grade students had the following comparative passing percentages: In Reading, 48% of the general school population passed TAKS Examinations, and 13% of ELLs passed the same Exams. For the 2004-2005 school year, these trends continued: 60% of freshmen

campus-wide passed TAKS Reading Examinations, while only 22% of ELL freshman students passed. The disparity in Reading achievement did not diminish in 2005-2006, when 69% of the all ninth graders passed TAKS Reading, as compared with 36% of ELLs.

In Mathematics, 23% of all ninth graders attained passing marks in 2003-2004, while only 5% of ELLs passed those same Exams. In 2004-2005, the same achievement gap appears in student data as 33% of ninth-graders from the general school population passed Mathematics, while only 15% of the ELL freshmen posted passing scores. In 2005-2006, the percentages of ninth grade ELL students passing TAKS Math remained much lower than the overall percentage of ninth graders passing, as the campus group posted passing percentages of 30%, and the percentage of ELL students passing TAKS Math was only 11%. In addition, the percentage of ninth grade students who passed all TAKS Exams for the general school population was several times that of the ELL student group in all three years. In 2003-2004, 21% of students school-wide passed all TAKS Examinations while only 2% of ELLs passed. In 2004-2005, 31% of the general school population passed all TAKS Exams, while only 9% of the ELL students passed these same tests. Similar passing percentages (31% and 9% respectively) occurred for the 2005-2006 Mathematics Exams.

Table II: Academic Excellence Indicator System: TAKS Grade 10
Source: Texas Education Agency

TAKS Standard Met Grade 10

	2004		2005		2006	
	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL
Eng Lang Arts	50%	13%	51%	8%	78%	33%
Mathematics	25%	6%	42%	13%	46%	22%
Science	22%	4%	39%	6%	38%	11%
Soc Studies	60%	25%	72%	31%	72%	33%
All Tests	15%	2%	25%	4%	31%	8%

Tenth Grade TAKS Examinations

For Central High School tenth graders, achievement gaps between the general school population and ELL students reflected the same trends that occurred for the ninth grade TAKS takers; but in tenth grade, Science and Social Studies Exams--both text-intensive--are also required. For 2003-2004, tenth grade students had the following comparative passing percentages: In English Language Arts, 50% of the general school population passed TAKS Exams, and 13% of ELLs passed the same tests. For the 2004-2005 school year, 51% of tenth graders campus-wide passed TAKS ELA Examinations, while only 8% of ELL tenth graders students passed. The disparity in ELA achievement did not diminish in 2005-2006, when 78% of the all tenth graders passed TAKS ELA Exams, as compared with 33% of ELL tenth grade students.

In Mathematics, 25% of all tenth graders attained passing marks, while only 6% of ELLs passed those same TAKS Exams in 2003-2004. In 2004-2005, a

comparable achievement gap appears in student data as 42% of tenth-graders from the general school population passed Math, while only 13% of the ELL tenth graders posted passing scores. In 2005-2006, the percentages of tenth grade ELL students passing TAKS Math remained lower than the overall percentage of ninth graders passing; the campus general school population posted passing percentages of 46%, and the percentage of ELL students passing TAKS Math was only 22%.

In tenth grade Science, 22% of the general school population that tested in 2004-2005 passed TAKS Exams while 4% of English Language Learners passed the same examinations. For the 2004-2005 school year, these trends continued: 39% of tenth graders campus-wide passed TAKS ELA Examinations, while only 6% of ELL tenth graders students passed. The disparity in ELA achievement did not diminish in 2005-2006, when 38% of the all tenth graders passed TAKS English Language Arts, as compared with 11% of ELL students.

In Social Studies, 60% of all tenth graders attained passing marks in 2003-2004, while only 25% of ELLs passed those same Exams in that year. In 2004-2005, 72% of tenth-graders from the general school population passed Social Studies Exams, while only 31% of the ELL tenth graders posted passing scores. In 2005-2006, the percentages of tenth-grade ELL students passing TAKS Social Studies remained lower than the overall percentage of tenth graders passing, as the general school population posted passing percentages of 72%, and the percentage of ELL students passing TAKS Social Studies was only 33%.

The percentage of tenth graders who passed all TAKS Exams for the general school population greatly exceeded the tenth grade ELL student group in all three years. In 2003-2004, 15% of tenth grade students school-wide passed all examinations, and only 2% of ELLs passed. In 2004-2005, 25% of the general school population passed all TAKS Exams, while only 4% of the ELL students passed these same tests. Similar passing percentages occurred on the 2005-2006 Exams when 31% of the general student population passed all examinations, and only 8% of ELL students passed.

Table III: Academic Excellence Indicator System: TAKS Grade 11
Source: Texas Education Agency

TAKS Standard Met Grade 11
Grade 11 (April Administration)

	2004		2005		2006	
	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL
Eng Lang Arts	69%	29%	77%	35%	76%	34%
Mathematics	55%	41%	65%	44%	68%	51%
Science	53%	23%	63%	35%	60%	28%
Soc Studies	83%	60%	83%	60%	89%	65%
All Tests	36%	12%	48%	18%	48%	8%

Eleventh Grade TAKS Examinations

Eleventh grade students take the most critical examinations—the TAKS Exit Exams. To graduate high school, students must pass all TAKS Exams during their eleventh- or twelfth-grade years. Just as tenth grade students test in four core areas, so do the eleventh and twelfth graders.

In English Language Arts, 69% of the Central High School general school population passed TAKS Exams, and 29% of English Language Learners passed the same Examinations. For the 2004-2005 school year, these trends continued: 77% of tenth graders campus-wide passed TAKS ELA Examinations, while only 35% of ELL tenth grade students passed. The disparity in ELA achievement did not diminish in 2005-2006, when 76% of the all tenth graders passed TAKS English Language Arts, as compared with 34% of ELL students.

In Mathematics, 55% of all eleventh graders attained passing marks in 2003-2004, while only 41% of ELLs passed those same Exams. In 2004-2005, a similar achievement gap appears in student data as 65% of eleventh-graders from the general school population passed Mathematics, while only 44% of the ELL eleventh graders posted passing scores. In 2005-2006, the percentages of eleventh grade ELL students passing TAKS Math remained much lower than the overall percentage of eleventh graders passing; the campus group attained passing percentages of 68%, and the percentage of ELL students passing TAKS Math was only 51%.

In Science, 53% of the eleventh graders in the general school population passed Exams in 2003-2004, and 23% of English Language Learners passed the same examinations. For the 2004-2005 school year, the disparity remained: 63% of eleventh graders campus-wide passed TAKS Science Examinations, while only 35% of ELL eleventh graders passed. The gap in ELA TAKS achievement did

not diminish in 2005-2006, when 60% of the all tenth graders passed TAKS English, as compared with 28% of ELL students.

In Social Studies, 83% of all eleventh graders attained passing marks in 2003-2004, while only 60% of ELLs passed those same Exams. In 2004-2005, an equivalent achievement gap appears in student data as 83% of eleventh-graders from the general school population passed Social Studies, while only 60% of the ELL eleventh graders posted passing scores. In 2005-2006, the percentages of eleventh grade ELL students passing TAKS Social Studies remained much lower than the overall percentage of eleventh graders passing, as the general school population posted passing percentages of 89% while the percentage of ELL students passing TAKS Social Studies was only 65%.

In addition, the percentage of eleventh grade students who passed all exams for the general school population was several times that of the ELL student group in all three years. In 2003-2004, 36% of students school-wide passed all TAKS Examinations; and only 12% of ELLs passed. In 2004-2005, 48% of the general school population passed all Exams, while only 18% of the ELL students passed. Comparative passing percentages occurred on the 2005-2006 Exams when 48% of eleventh graders in the general student population passed all TAKS Examinations, and only 8% of ELL eleventh grade students passed.

Table IV: Academic Excellence Indicator System: Sum of All Grades Tested
Source: Texas Education Agency

TAKS Met Standard (Sum of All Grades Tested)

	2004		2005		2006	
	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL
Reading/ELA	54%	17%	62%	22%	73%	36%
Mathematics	32%	14%	45%	24%	45%	28%
Science	35%	13%	51%	25%	49%	28%
Soc Studies	69%	39%	78%	49%	81%	62%
All Tests	23%	4%	34%	10%	35%	8%

Sum of All Grades Tested

As a school, students from all grade levels combined posted significantly higher passing rates in the general student population than did ELL students. In 2003-2004, the combined (all Exam) passing percentage for the general student population was 23% of students as compared to 4% of ELL students. In 2004-2005, the cumulative passing percentages were 34% for the general student population and 10% for ELL students. In 2005-2006, cumulative passing percentages were 35% and 8% passing respectively.

Table V: Academic Excellence Indicator System: Participation
Source: Texas Education Agency

TAKS/SDAA II Participation

2004		2005		2006	
Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL
80.6%	67.9%	82.4%	75.5%	82%	72%

SDAA II and TAKS Participation Rates

The SDAA II is a TAKS equivalency examination taken by some identified special needs students. Participation figures for TAKS and SDAA II count toward meeting AYP requirements. Schools are expected to demonstrate that at least 85% of eligible students test on examination days. In 2003-2004, participation rates were at 80.6% for the general school population, and 67.9% for ELL students testing. In 2004-2005, 82.4% of the general student population participated, while participation figures for ELL students were only 67.9%. Participation in 2005-2006 continued this trend with 82% of the eligible students in the general student population participating, while only 72% of eligible ELL students tested. In all three years, TAKS and SDAA participation percentages fell short of the requirements for the campus to meet Adequately Yearly Progress. The significance for the individual ELL students is not that AYP percentages were not met for Central High School, but that high percentages of students missed out on the testing experience, and hence diminished their chances of passing TAKS Exit Exams required for graduation.

High Failure Rate of ELL Students

According to staff members, the course failure rate for ELL students at Central High School is disproportionately high, especially in freshman courses, indicating that, for these students, existing instructional programs are not always

adequate. Often, coursework is taken and retaken, delaying progress toward graduation and reducing opportunities to take more interesting or relevant courses that those students might choose. In addition, course requirements are increasingly rigorous each year. In a recent ruling by the Texas State Board of Education (2006), credit requirements for graduating under the Texas Recommended Plan will increase to include four years of Science and four years of Mathematics for students graduating in spring of 2008.

Difficulty in Accruing Credits

Not all ELL students experience one year's English growth and advance to the next English course at year's end, nor are all ELL students successful in other courses. Students who fail classes repeat them, but students may instead repeat only the fall or spring portion of a course when that segment is again offered—sometimes a calendar year later. For example: If a student fails the spring semester of Algebra I with a grade average of "50", that student would need at least an average grade of "90" for the first semester to create a combined passing average for the year. Because "Part B" of Algebra I is not offered in the fall, he/she may miss a half year or more of Mathematics before he is able to take the missing component. For courses that involve progressive knowledge and skills—such as Mathematics--concepts build upon one another, making it very difficult for students to progress without continuous learning.

The Effects of Excessive Absences

A severe problem that affects credit accrual and course advancement is excessive absences. By Texas statute, students are required to attend ninety percent of scheduled school days each term to receive course credit, regardless of class performance or grade average. Because receiving communication of school policies or state statutes including Compulsory Attendance laws can be a problem for many ELL students and their parents or guardians, students may find themselves in the fall of their sophomore or junior years, unknowingly still categorized as freshmen with very few credits on record. This is not to suggest that the daily attendance of all ELL students is poor; in fact, AEIS statistics reflect that attendance rates for ELL students and those of the general school population are almost equivalent; the problem for many ELLs lies in communication of relevant policies, and in continuing compliance with these expectations.

Communicating School Policies Clearly

Certainly, students are responsible for credit deficit situations; however, students and guardians receive little understandable information pertaining to absence policies. The Student Code of Conduct contained in the AISD Student Handbook is published in two languages—English and Spanish. Therefore, students and guardians fluent in neither do not effectively receive all policy information. Additionally, there may be difficulty reporting accumulated absences to these same students and parents in a timely manner, and limited

information shared regarding opportunities to perform community service in order to "clear" absences. Often, unadvised ELL students find themselves in credit deficit circumstances for which there is no viable solution.

Recapturing Credits

Historically, students have been allowed to perform community work outside the school day to restore lost credits--at any time during their school tenure. That practice changed for 2005-2006, when the requirement for "current semester only" credit recovery was introduced. The sometimes "temporary" credit deficit is not the principle problem, however; a greater problem is that students who are denied credit for courses passed may be required to retake those courses before advancing to the next classes in sequence, or may progress to advanced courses only to learn at some point that they must later retake previous coursework. Thus, many ELL students--assuming they are accumulating credits toward graduation based on grades--are abruptly confronted with the grim reality that timely high school graduation is not possible.

Arbitrary Withdrawal

Students who do not succeed academically can quickly become "statistics" which reflect badly on school performance ratings. That is one reason that, in many schools, some students with truancy problems are excluded from school dropout figures, and their non-attendance or departure from high school is sometimes documented in ambiguous or untracked ways. Students with serious truancy issues sometimes withdraw from school to avoid court action, promising

to enroll elsewhere. A number of ELL students who leave school under such circumstances do not enroll in other institutions, or they return to school after a period of months without formal instruction during the interim. Previous progress in English is often negated and students may regress to their former levels of English proficiency or to even lower levels of English proficiency despite the passage of time. According to one Central High School teacher:

> This is a terrible thing to say, but people are number driven. When they see scores start going down, they start paying attention. I will say that there is almost no one who drops out of this high school; they all move to Mexico or get transferred to a different school. But, no one ever checks to see if they got to the different school; I have had lots of students tell me that. I also know that we dropped a lot of seniors in the last six weeks because of lack of graduation, and they're almost all ELL.

Once a student is "dropped", he must complete the entire enrollment process and can be denied enrollment based on several considerations. Attendance data is often combined with other information such as grades and discipline records to determine whether or not a student is an asset or a liability to the school—if a student is a "good investment" or a "bad bet". According to another teacher in this high school, one of her senior ELL students was arbitrarily transferred to another campus:

> I had one student last year who didn't pass the first semester, but passed the second semester. And, he was older—about twenty. I got him to pass TAKS. He was also going to drop out of school, because he still had a lot of subjects that he was lacking; he was also a worker. One day, he came in with a paper, and I said, "You've made the decision, you're going to get your GED" (which was what we had discussed). He said, "No, they would not let me; they said I'm transferring to Alexander High School." And I looked at the paper which stated that he was transferring; they

would not let him withdraw because he would have counted as a dropout.

Reading Deficits of ELL Students

There is a strong argument that fundamental reading courses should be available for any English Language Learners who demonstrate reading deficiencies. Considering that many ELL students read well below grade level, and considering also that most materials for class work and independent study are text based, emphasizing reading instruction for struggling ELL students would appear to be prudent practice. According to one Central High School ESOL teacher, spring 2005 Reading Language Inventory (RLI) scores for the thirty-one Central High School tenth and eleventh grade ELL students enrolled in her English classes reflected a mean independent reading level of just above fifth grade with an instructional reading level much lower—early third grade.

Since basic reading skills are required in all academic activities, and—higher level reading skills are needed to decode and comprehend information presented in class assignments--poor reading handicaps students. In addition, standardized examinations require students to read and analyze passages or problems, and understand the conventions and subtleties of the English language. Despite these needs, most ELL students are rarely enrolled in formal reading courses at Central High School after their initial year in school. This is generally a decision based on two factors over which the school may have little control--

staffing constraints, and graduation requirements that push students to accumulate a quota of creditable courses in core areas.

The Bottom Line: Limited Progress

Without effective instructional programs for ELL students, adequate and continual academic progress is very difficult. Statistics reflect that a large percentage of Central High School ELLs do not graduate on time, and staff members purport that this trends also applies to ELL students at other grade levels. Tables VI contains data published by the Texas Education Agency as part of the 2006 Academic Excellence Indicator System Campus Information Pages.

Table VI: AEIS, Graduation and Continued High School Rates
Source: Texas Education Agency

High School Completion Rate	2002-2003		2003-2004		2004-2005	
	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL	Campus	ELL
Graduated	67.0%	52.9%	68.3%	46.3%	71.4%	58.1%
Continued HS	16.4%	31.4%	18.0%	38.9%	16.7%	39.6%

Graduation Rates

For all three years reported (2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005), Central High School ELLs posted graduation rate substantially lower than those of the student population as a whole. For 2002-2003, the general school graduation rate was 67%, while the ELL graduation rate was 53%. This trend worsened for ELL students in 2003-2004, when the graduation rate fell to 46%.,

while the general school graduation percentage rose to 68% during this same time. In 2004-2005, graduation rates increased to 71.4% for all students, but rose only to 58.1% for ELL students.

Drop Out Rates and Continued High School Rates

The drop-out rates for the two groups are almost equivalent, and the attendance rates are also much the same. Superficially, this is good news for school efforts toward keeping English Language Learners in school. However, there is much incongruence between the drop-out rates and the graduation rates. Some students are also represented in the group that neither drop out nor graduate, but are accounted for statistically in the category of "Continued High School". In 2002-2003, 16.4% of the Class of 2003 returned to school the following year, while 31% of the ELL students returned the next year. For 2003-2004, 18% of the Class of 2004 returned to school in the fall, while almost 39% percent of ELL seniors students returned the following year. In 2004-2005, 16.7% of senior students returned to school the following year, while 27.8% of ELLs returned to school for an additional year. This represents a failure rate for senior ELL students that is almost double that represented by the general school population. In effect, over a sustained period of four years enrollment, only a minority of ELL students who begin at Central High School as a freshman cohort graduate as a senior class.

Challenges for Home/School Partnership

School connectedness is not only a bond between the school and student; it is a bond between the school and family. A large number of ELL parents and guardians do not speak English. Teachers without adequate facility in languages that ELL parents prefer are often unable to conduct conversations with non-English speaking parents and to consistently and effectively dialogue concerning students' attendance, assignments, behavior, and grades. In addition, grading and other reports sent home are generally in English only, and in a format that may be foreign to parents who might not know what a course such as "Communications Applications" entails, or what an asterisk denoting withheld credit really means. Research literature identifies many reasons that the parents of ELL students may assume a more passive than active role (Chavkin 1991; 1993; Epstein 1987). Often, ELL parents hesitate to visit the school as there is generally no one able or available to communicate with them regarding their children's needs.

Standardized Testing

Equity in testing is also an issue that affects Central High School ELL students. Research indicates greater success in academic test taking when students are familiar with examination formats. Although alternative assessments are administered to Newcomer ELL students in place of the "real" TAKS, these instruments often do not reflect the caliber and scope of the examinations taken by the general student population. The No Child Left Behind Law is working to

reduce testing inequities for ELL students. Beginning with this 2006-2007 school year, districts are to provide authentic testing experiences for all students, or to provide documentation as to why they could not do so; however, these "substitute" TAKS Exams often lack the research foundations of TAKS Exams which were developed over the course of almost twenty years. In addition, when campuses receive class or student achievement profiles, non-TAKS testers are omitted. Thus, there is less information to guide decisions for those students as to course work selections and tutorial needs.

Since testing is conducted separately for those students who have passed or failed previous examinations, students are well aware who the re-testers are, just as they are aware of which students are enrolled in TAKS English, TAKS Mathematics or other remedial TAKS-geared courses. Inadvertent "publicizing" of student achievement levels can create problems for ELL students often overrepresented in these groups.

Curriculum Concerns

Bilingual Education and ESOL

According to ELL teachers and administrators, Central High School has always conscientiously focused on the quality of its instructional programs for all students, and embraced initiatives that support state and federal legislation and reflect current pedagogical thought. In the district's Bilingual Education/English as a Second Language Handbook (AISD 2006), this philosophy is stated:

> Austin Independent School District believes English Language Learners (ELLs) can attain high levels of proficiency in their native language and in Academic English while acquiring the academic skills necessary to meet the societal demands of an ever-changing global society.

To accomplish this end, the district devised a four-tier program structure based on categories of English proficiency and levels of student experience. English as a Second Language is an exclusive academic strand provided to all English Language Learners for a minimum of two years. It is premised upon three requirements: that ELL students are provided instruction for two-three class periods through the use of ESOL techniques, that students are otherwise enrolled in core and elective classes, and that campus staff are qualified to provide appropriate instruction. This is a minimal prescription, allowing much academic decision making to the discretion of individual campus leaders.

Instruction in classes other than ESOL is conducted only in English, despite the position of the school district that "it is efficient to begin academic work in the student's first language" (AISD Bilingual/ESOL Handbook 2005). The departure from a bilingual approach for high school students is in part an efficiency issue, as there is no five- year or extended program for ELL students, or additional teaching staff to support an extended program, if one were created.

Elective Courses and Pathways

Because not all district high schools offer the same course pathways, or all of the same courses, AISD policy does not specify which elective courses are appropriate for ELL students--or in which sequence they should be taken. While

Central High School counselors prefer to place students in interactive, "hands-on" elective courses, many students are assigned classes on a space-available basis. Late enrollees often face this problem, when they are scheduled into classes such as B.C.I.S. (Business Information Computer Systems) which require the ability to understand and use a language with an alphabet students have never seen, and with vocabulary and language rules they may not know. ELL students frequently report that this class stands between them and their graduation.

During recent years, there has been an ongoing debate over the value of vocational strands such as Agriculture or Business. One current viewpoint is that if a block of specialty courses leads to a useable certification, it is worthwhile for students. ELL students who are struggling academically and must repeat courses often have had little chance to access entire blocks of these specialty strands since the bulk of their coursework is consumed by core courses.

Teacher Preparation

Although AISD's Bilingual/ESOL policies call for "appropriate instruction" for ELL students, delivery of appropriate instruction hinges on both the quantity and quality of "appropriate instruction" teachers are able to provide. The ELL training requirement for district schools includes a single dose, one-half day orientation, and is not required of staff members who are late hires. Another significant problem is the minimal level of expertise required of ESOL instructors. Every ESOL teacher must possess a Texas teaching certificate in

ESOL, but none are required to earn teaching certificates in English—the very subject they are expected to teach.

US History and I.P.C.

Appropriate curriculum and sufficient materials to support delivery of instruction are issues of concern for ELLs. During the past school year, some campus ESOL staff members raised the concern that secondary Social Studies TAKS Examinations encompass a body of knowledge not introduced in high school, but in middle school—knowledge related to the study of US History. Immigrant students new to the United States have often essentially missed US history information spanning several hundred years--knowledge they will be tested on for TAKS Exit Examinations required for high school graduation.

Another curriculum problem for ELL students is the requirement of the course entitled Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC) which students take at the freshman level. This course not only involves a combination of Biology and Physics vocabulary and concepts, but requires knowledge of Algebra—a course that many incoming ELL students have not taken or have not mastered. According to campus ESOL personnel, the failure rate for ELL students at Central High School was a staggering 80% for this course in 2005-2006.

Content Support

Content support specifically designed for ELL students is provided largely through campus discretion. Although NCLB mandates interventions for students who fail classes, many "borderline" ELL students need support also. Spanish

versions of some texts (along with Spanish worksheets and other materials) are available for a price--if teachers are able to arrange purchase through campus administered funds such as Title III monies, or Title I School Improvement (SIP) Funds. However, corollary materials for ELLs are only published in Spanish, and most are translations—not trans-adaptations. If a teacher cannot read Spanish-- or if a student possesses a first language other than Spanish--these materials are not very useful. In addition, preparing alternate materials poses a burden for teachers, already scrambling with increased accountability for student performance.

Just as standardized testing represents a "Catch 22" for ELL students, standard curriculum does as well. Either ELL students enroll in courses that may pose great linguistic difficulty, or they encounter the effects of delaying critical courses. Whereas the majority of Central High School students take Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies each year until graduation requirements are met, ELL students are not always enrolled in all core courses every year. Some critical credits are postponed as students gain English proficiency. Inadequate preparation in any core area—Mathematics, Reading, Writing, Science, or Social Studies-- reduces students' chances of passing TAKS and graduating, regardless of how many credits they are accruing.

Many students become discouraged and disinterested when they do not see continuous progress toward their goal of graduation, and some abandon that pursuit. Although the high school completion rate for all Central High School

ELL students has improved to 74%, it remains well below the overall campus completion rate, and many ELL students continue to "fall through the cracks".

Campus Initiatives that Work: Or Do They?

Sheltered Instruction

Sheltered Instruction is employed by some classroom teachers, but is not widely utilized on campus. SIOP training, a comprehensive Sheltered English training was offered on Saturdays throughout the 2005-2006 school year. According to department heads, many teachers do not attend trainings such as this one due to a lack of time—not to a lack of interest. In addition, attendees are not financially compensated for their five days of attendance. However, the academic performance of ELL students is a concern expressed in the school's Campus Improvement Plan, and campus-wide Sheltered English Training is listed specifically as a strategy in that document.

According to campus administrators, high teacher turnover creates a need for constant professional development. Central High School loses roughly ten to twenty percent of its teachers per year. This is not an unusual turnover rate for an urban high school, but these cumulative losses can create a significant problem over time. When extrapolated, this attrition rate represents a turnover of more than half of the Central High School teaching staff over the course of four years, making the building of a trained and unified teaching force very difficult.

The Study Skills Class

Another campus initiative for ELLs is the Study Skills class. This class has no formal curriculum, and instead is basically an hour slot available for the ELL Newcomer students to spend with ESOL teachers for whatever instruction, support, or re-teaching the ESOL teachers deem necessary or important. Some Study Skills classes provide vocabulary lessons, others allow students to work in cooperative groups on core course assignments, and others include orientation sessions on school rules, procedures, and systems. ESOL Teachers report that the greatest benefit of the Study Skills class is that students are able to interact informally, to ask questions they might be hesitant to posit in the larger classroom arena, to develop relationships, and to receive information on school events and other critical aspects of school life.

Campus Staffing Prerogatives

As overall campus enrollment rises and falls, staffing allocations increase and decrease accordingly. In this school district, building principals have the authority to decide in most cases which academic programs are offered, and how staff members are assigned to each program. Student needs, student interests, and long-range graduation planning all contribute to what courses "make" on a particular campus, but the final decisions as to the fate of discretionary programs and individual courses lie with each building principal. Over the last five years, ESOL staffing at Central High School was increased, though enrollment figures

remained constant. However, staff utilization changed from largely pull-out or self-contained classes to mainstreamed, team-taught classes.

The Twenty-First Century High School Redesign

Among major policy shifts that campuses including Central High School are dealing with is "The Twenty-first Century High School Redesign", an attempt to organize large schools into smaller learning communities with more intimacy and hopefully greater effectiveness. The high school redesign theory does not increase resources; it shifts them. In conjunction with High School Redesign, ESOL classes have been reduced from first and second year English to first year English only. Following their initial year, ELL students are now placed in heterogeneous English classrooms with regular (non ESOL) English teachers. The ESOL teachers teach "mixed" English classes, and team with teachers in other core area courses to support ELL students. Just how this teaming is working in the short or long term has yet to be determined.

A Fair Share of Campus Funds and Resources

Central High School's English Language Learners do not constitute the only campus student group at risk of failure or dropout. Central High School also boasts a large number of students receiving Special Education services, as well as a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, expectant mothers, students employed full time, and other high-needs groups. Thus, ELL students do not represent the primary school focus for Central High School, although they do constitute the largest school subgroup.

Like all other classroom teachers, ESOL teachers face the demands of increased academic rigor and heightened accountability; in addition, they must address more severe learning deficits such as extremely low English reading levels. According to ESOL teaching staff, there is never enough money budgeted for ample resources to adequately serve ELL students.

Identification, Placement, and the International Welcome Center

Central High School follows language assessment steps outlined by the Texas Education Agency's Texas Education Code (2005) that include language screening and transcript evaluation. The primary document for language screening is the Home Language Survey which notes language spoken at home and date of entry into U.S. schools. The International Welcome Center--consisting of a bilingual campus administrator--serves to orient new students, translate transcripts, administer language proficiency tests, and recommend placement in coursework—all within twenty days of initial enrollment. Students are then reviewed annually at minimum, for as long as they remain enrolled on campus. ESOL teachers are a valuable part of the annual assessment process, but placement decisions are officially made by an LPAC (Language Proficiency Assessment Committee) which includes teachers, parents, and administrators.

Language testing at Central High School is a thorough and deliberate process; however, there is sometimes a certain degree of guesswork in deciding just what course work new ELL enrollees should take. Although students' transcripts are evaluated when they are received, some students do not bring

transcripts with them, nor do their former schools always send them promptly, especially if previous schools are located in other countries. Students who do provide transcripts within a specified period of time are placed in freshman courses regardless of the coursework they purport to have completed. This can pose a problem for older students who are reluctant to attend classes alongside significantly younger students, or to attend classes which they know they already earned credit for.

Prudent placement becomes an issue when students have earned their first year's English credit, but do not have the pre-requisite skills to succeed in second, third, or fourth year English. Teachers are not required to modify course work for ELL students--only to provide opportunities for remediation or acceleration; therefore, for many ELL students, the standard curriculum is simply not a good fit.

Custom Courses

For 2005-2006, ESOL Biology was instituted. In this class, the most limited English speakers are placed with a teacher certified in both ESOL and Biology, and students are instructed using ESOL techniques with translation to Spanish when deemed appropriate. ESOL Algebra was introduced in 2002-2003, and has operated in much the same way as ESOL Biology. Achievement scores between ELL students in these classes and ELL students in regular classes have not officially been compared. But, not all of Central High School's ELL students are Spanish speakers. According to the "SUP" theory, translation of academic

vocabulary into Spanish might be confusing for students whose native language is neither English nor Spanish.

Programs for Advanced ELL Students

As long as students remain legally classified as English Language Learner, the school must conduct annual assessments known as TELPAS (Texas Language Proficiency Assessment System), which include English reading, writing, listening, and speaking examinations. Should a student score poorly on any of these measures, the campus is obligated to provide support services to those students. Even exited students (who have passed TAKS Exams) may at any time return to ELL status, should they perform poorly on the TELPAS. Thus, ELL status is an enduring category for many students. "Service", however, can be symbolic--consisting mostly of documenting routine supports such as tutoring.

Summer School for ELL Students

One program that the district consistently provides for all ELLs is tuition free summer school in which ELL students enrolled in any grade level may attend summer school classes for a very small enrollment fee. Summer school programs are generally held on centrally located campuses with high ELL student populations. In addition, transportation is provided daily, and students who qualify for free or reduced lunch are provided meals during their attendance. Through summer school, ELLs are able to keep learning continuously and to experience instruction which utilizes special, compacted curriculum developed

specifically for accelerated summer programs. In recent years, TAKS preparation classes have also been held in conjunction with summer school sessions.

The International High School

In the fall of 2004, the school district instituted a long-awaited induction academy for English Language Learners, the International High School, operating within an east central high school campus. According to the International School's principal, the program is designed for "Newcomers" (ELL students with minimal English skills) and can accommodate up to two hundred enrollees from all sectors of the district. For the purpose of equity among school attendance zones, each "sending" school is allotted a certain number of "slots" based on respective campus ELL enrollment.

At the International High School, instruction in academic and formal English are provided, along with an immediate introduction of other subjects. As new enrollees register at their home campuses, immigrant ELL students with minimal or no English facility are re-routed to the International School until capacity there is met. During its first year, just over one hundred students were served, though several times that number qualified for admission.

Originally planned to serve over-age immigrant students seventeen years of age and older, the school currently accepts only the youngest of high school ELL students--mostly fourteen and fifteen year olds. According to district administrators, younger students have been shown to acquire English more quickly, and therefore reap academic benefits for a greater portion of their high

school tenure. According to some staff members outside of administration, older or over age immigrant students demonstrate a high incidence of failure or drop out, and enrolling younger students in the International High School yields better drop out statistics than enrolling students whose probability of success is marginal.

Creation of the International High School has had a significant impact on the ELL population at Central High School, yet many students who could benefit from the International High School, and who may not yet be equipped for a standard all-English curriculum still must begin their tenure in AISD at Central High School. Nonetheless, the International High School offers a design that seemingly serves Newcomer students very well, by "jumpstarting" their English language acquisition and exposure to the standard curriculum. In addition, the IHS provides a two-year program, allowing teachers and administrators to develop personal relationships with ELL students, and provide more unified assessment and instruction during students' tenure there.

A unique aspect of the curriculum at the International High School is the expectation that all professional staff members teach one "advisory" class per day. The advisories are custom classes that are based on student interest and teacher talent or skills; one example of this is a quilting class that is taught by the campus Curriculum Coordinator. Students rotate through several special interest classes over the course of a school year.

Although student performance data for the International High School indicates that the school did not meet AYP for 2005-2006, administrators there contend that the International High School favorably compares--academically and socially--with other schools in the district. According to staff administrators, the benefits of attending the International High School go beyond measures that are reflected in AEIS data, and others will take time to show cumulative effects.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS OF THE STUDENT AND STAFF SURVEYS

Overview

In this chapter, I first explain the reason why survey responses were considered in the aggregate, rather than separated by variables such as gender or grade level. I then explore responses of English Language Learners to each survey question set. These responses are represented as percentages of students rating their agreement as high, neutral or moderate, or low. I subsequently review and discuss the staff responses to statements in the corollary staff survey. Finally, I compare the student and staff responses.

Considering Aggregate Responses

Some of the characteristics within the ELL student sample group include course level (Newcomer ESOL, ESOL I, ESOL II, or advanced English), grade level, age, gender, and length of time attending Central High School. Due to the limited scope of this study, student responses were reported and analyzed in the aggregate, not categorized or interpreted by treating these characteristics as variables. More extensive research could allow for detailed data analyses by analyzing the responses as related to factors such as age and gender.

This study's primary focus is qualitative, and therefore the personal conversations and commentary of students and staff members comprise the greater portion of the research. It was important to include a cross-section of ELL

students in order to construct a complete portrait or panoramic view of the ELL experience at Central High School.

The student surveys consist of fourteen statements of agreement or non-agreement—statements that corresponded with the four dimensions that this study addresses: quality of instructional programs, school connectedness, student self-efficacy and self-image, and ongoing progress toward academic and related goals. Three statements address each dimension. The last two statements concern other related information—the reasons for variation in school success among ELLs, and additional input that students might choose to offer.

Student Responses Regarding Quality of Instructional Programs

In response to the statement, "Teachers here provide good instruction", 74% of ELL students endorsed the view that instruction at Central High School is good (expressed by the highest ratings of "5' or "6"). Of those surveyed, 13% of the students rated their agreement as a "3" or "4", and 13% of the students rated instruction as lacking by responding with agreement ratings of "1" or "2".

The next statement in this set pertained to teacher caring. In response to the statement, "Teachers here care about the students", ELL students responded in the following ways: Overwhelmingly, students indicated that teachers do care, with 74% of respondents rating their agreement with this statement as a "5" or a "6". Of those responding, 14% rated their agreement as somewhat neutral or moderate

(with ratings of "3" or a "4"), and a minority of ELL students (12%) rated their agreement as a "1 or a "2".

The third statement in the group involved the effects of good instruction. To the statement, "I have learned a lot of English in this school", students responded in the following ways: Of those surveyed, 59% of the ELL students expressed that they had learned a great deal of English, responding with an agreement rating of "5" or "6" . The balance of the students took either a neutral or moderate position (with 20% of the students scoring their agreement as a "3" or a "4) or expressed low agreement (with 21% of the students rating their agreement as a "1" or a "2"). Overall, student responses to these three items showed strong support for the instruction and caring from their teachers, but less endorsement for the effects that these efforts had on their English acquisition.

Student Responses Regarding School Connectedness:

In this section, students were asked to evaluate their agreement or disagreement with statements that concerned the ways or degrees in which they were involved in extra-curricular activities, and the ways in which parents were involved formally or informally in the schooling process. Young (1997) differentiates between formal parent participation in school (such as attendance at school events) and informal participation (such as assistance with assignments). In that sense, the survey statements in this statement set address formal parent

participation. The first statement concerned the availability of after-school academic assistance for students.

In response to the statement, "This school offers many opportunities and assistance to students in addition to classroom instruction", participants responded in this way: Most ELL students (61%) expressed strong agreement--with responses of "5" or "6". Of the remaining respondents, 29% expressed neutrality or moderate agreement with agreement ratings of "3" and "4", and only 10% of the students expressed low agreement, with agreement ratings of "1" or "2".

The second question in this set, "My parents often attend school functions" showed a much lower level of agreement. Here, the majority of the students indicated low agreement, with 45% of the students ranking their agreement as a "1" or a "2". 34% of the respondents expressed neutrality or moderate agreement on this issue by rating their agreement as a "3" or a "4", and 21% (a minority of ELL students) responded that their parents often attend school functions by indicating strong agreement ratings of "5" or a "6".

The final statement in this portion asked students to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "I participate in extra-curricular activities". With this statement, also, a minority of the students indicated their agreement. 58% of the participants rated their agreement as a "1" or "2", indicating that they do not participate in extra-curricular. A neutral or moderate view was taken by 17% of the students who assigned agreement ratings of "3" or "4", and 25% of students indicated that they do participate in extra-

curricular activities, as indicated by agreement ratings of "5" or "6". Viewing the responses to this category as a whole, a much greater percentage of students indicated that the school provides opportunities to participate than indicated that their participation is ensured because of those opportunities.

Student Responses Regarding Self-Image and Self-Efficacy

Statements in this set were of a highly personal nature, involving how the students were treated by others, and how they perceived themselves. In response to the statement "It is easy for me to make and keep friends here; other students like me", participants overwhelmingly responded that they do have many friends and are well-liked. A large majority of respondents (70%) assigned this statement an agreement rating of a "5" or a "6". The remainder of the students were divided, with 15% of the students indicating neutral or moderate agreement (scoring their agreement as a "3" or a "4"), and an equal percentage of the survey group (15%) rating their agreement as only a "1" or a "2".

In response to the statement, "School is easy for me; I am a good student", students indicated something different. A majority of students surveyed (54%) rated their agreement with this statement as either a "5" or a "6", while the balance of the students rated their agreement as neutral to moderate or low. 27% of the students rated their agreement as either a "3" or a "4", and 29% of the students rated their agreement as only a "1" or a "2".

Regarding the third statement in this sequence, "I am usually happy in this school", 61% of the respondents agreed by rating their agreement as a "5" or a "6", while 17% of students took a neutral or moderate stance, scoring their agreement as a "3" or a "4". Another 21% of students indicated low agreement with this statement by responding with agreement ratings of "1" or "2".

Overall, students indicated strong agreement with items in this category. According to the ELL students, they have many friends, they are comfortable as students, and they are happy. However, they rated strength of relationships above their strength in academics.

Student Responses Regarding Ongoing Progress

In responses to the statement: "I will probably pass most of my classes", 79% of the students interviewed responded that they will probably pass most of their classes by rating their statement agreement as a "5' or a "6". A very small minority of the students interviewed (7%) indicated neutral or moderate agreement by scoring their agreement as a "3" or "4", and 14% of participants expressed that they probably will not pass all of their classes.

The next statement in this set pertained to the probability of graduating high school. In response to the statement "I will graduate from high school", ELL students responded in the following ways: Overwhelmingly, students indicated that they do plan on high school graduation as 67% of the respondents rated their agreement with this statement as a "5" or a "6". A small percentage of students

(13%) rated their agreement as somewhat neutral or moderate (rating the statement a "3" or a "4"), and a minority of ELL students (just 10%) rated their agreement as a "1 or a "2".

The final statement in this section involved the accrual of credits necessary to advance in grade level. To the statement, "I have enough credits to be placed in the grade level where I belong", students responded in the following ways: Strong agreement was expressed by 58% of the respondents who indicated agreement ratings of "5" or "6". A very small percentage (5%) of the students indicated neutral or moderate agreement by scoring their agreement as a "3" or a "4", and 39% of the students rated their agreement as a "1" or a "2".

Taken as a whole, there is a contrast between the large percentage of students who say that they are passing their classes, the smaller percentage of students that say they expect to graduate, and the still smaller percentage that indicate they are accruing sufficient credits to graduate. This could indicate some disconnection for students in the association between grades, credits, and graduation.

Staff Responses Regarding Quality of Instructional Programs

In response to the statement, "The teachers here provide quality instruction for ELL students", 33% of Central High School staff members endorsed the view that instruction at Central High School is very good (expressed by the highest ratings of "5' or "6"). Of those surveyed, 47% of the staff members (the highest percentage of respondents) rated the quality of instruction

that the school provides as a "3" or "4", and another 20% of participants rated instruction as lacking, by responding with ratings of "1" or "2".

The next statement in this set pertained to level of teacher caring. In response to the statement, "Teachers here demonstrate a high degree of caring toward ELL students", staff members responded in the following ways: The largest percentage of staff members (60%) rated their agreement as a "5" or a "6" 33% of participants indicated neutrality or a moderate degree of caring by submitting agreement ratings of "3" or "4", and a small minority of staff members (7%) rated their agreement only as a "1 or a "2".

The third statement in this category involved one of the effects of good instruction—English language acquisition. In response to the statement, "Overall, most ELL students acquire adequate English while in this school", staff members responded in the following ways: Of those surveyed, 24% of staff members indicated strong agreement by submitting agreement ratings of "5" or "6" while 56% of the staff members expressed neutrality or moderate agreement with the notion that their ELL students had learned a great deal of English, by assigning their agreement a "3" or a "4". A minority of staff interviewees (20%) expressed disagreement with the statement, rating their agreement as only a "1" or a "2".

Staff Responses Regarding School Connectedness

In this section, staff members were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with statements that concerned the degree to which ELL students

were involved in extra-curricular activities and to rate parents' involvement in the schooling process. The first statement concerned the availability of after-school academic assistance for students.

In response to the statement, "This school offers many opportunities and assistance for students in addition to classroom instruction", participants responded in this way: 50% of the respondents rated their agreement as a "5" or a "6", 36% of the participants expressed neutrality with agreement ratings of "3" or "4", and a small minority of staff members (14%) rated their agreement as only a "1" or a "2".

The second question in this set, "ELL parents often attend school functions" showed a much lower level of agreement. In fact, none of the staff members surveyed rated their agreement with this statement as a "5" or a "6", and only 14% of the respondents expressed neutrality with ratings of "3" or "4". By far, the greatest number of participants (86%) expressed low agreement, as represented in ratings of "1" or "2".

The final statement in this portion asked staff members to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "Most ELL students participate in extra-curricular activities". Slightly under a third of the respondents (30%) rated their agreement with this statement as a "5" or a "6". A smaller minority (20%) expressed neutrality by rating their agreement as a "3" or a "4". The largest group (50%) of the participants expressed that ELL students rarely

participate in extra-curricular activities by ranking their agreement as a "1" or a "2".

Viewing the responses to the category of "school connectedness" as a whole, a much greater percentage of staff members indicated that the school provides opportunities--than indicated that ELL students take advantage of those opportunities. In fact, most staff members expressed that student and parent school participation is very low.

Staff Survey Responses Regarding Student Self-Image and Self-Efficacy

Statements in this section involved how students are treated by others, and how they perceive themselves. These statements required some insight on the part of the staff members to perceive just how the ELL students think and feel. In response to the statement "It is easy for ELL students to make and keep friends here; most appear to be liked by others", participants overwhelmingly expressed strong agreement with the notion that ELL students have many friends, as 64% of staff responding rated their agreement as a "5" or a "6. Just over a third (36%) of the staff members surveyed indicated neutral agreement with ratings of "3" or "4", while none of the staff members rated their agreement as a "1" or a "2".

In response to the statement, "Most ELL students do not have difficulty in school, and perceive themselves as strong students", staff members indicated much lower agreement levels, as 20% of respondents rated their agreement as a

"5" or a "6", and the balance of the participants were divided between neutrality and low agreement (40% and 40% respectively).

Regarding the third statement in this sequence, "Overall, ELL students appear happy in this school", the largest number of respondents (63%) rated their agreement as a "5" or a "6". One third of the staff members (33%) rated their agreement as a "3" or a "4", and a very small minority (only 4%) rated their agreement as a "1" or a "2".

Reviewing the overall category ratings, staff members strongly expressed that the ELL students appear to have many friends and appear happy. Fewer staff members endorsed the notion that most ELL students are confident as scholars.

Staff Survey Responses Regarding Ongoing Progress of ELLs

In responses to the statement: "Most of my ELL students will pass my class(es)", just over a third of those surveyed (36%) expressed strong agreement with ratings of "5" or "6". The greatest percentage of interviewees (50%) expressed neutrality with rating of "3" or "4", and a small minority (14%) indicated disagreement with ratings of "1" or "2".

The next statement in this set pertained to the probability of graduating high school. In response to the statement "Most ELL students will graduate high school", staff members responded in the following ways: a minority of staff members (27%) surveyed expressed strong agreement that most ELL students will indeed graduate. Roughly one third of respondents (33%) indicated moderate

agreement or neutrality by rating their agreement as a "3" or "4". The largest percentage of staff members (40%) indicated low agreement by assigning this statement an agreement rating of "1" or "2".

The third statement in the section involved the accrual of credits necessary to advance in grade level. To the statement, "Most ELL students have enough credits to be placed in their appropriate grade level", staff members responded in the following ways: Only 10% of respondents rated their agreement as a "5" or a "6". The greatest percentage of participants (70%) indicated neutrality or moderate agreement with ratings of "3" or "4", and 20% of the staff members indicated low agreement (with ratings of "1" or "2").

Taken as a whole, there is sharp contrast between the percentage of staff members who say ELL students are passing their classes, and the percentage of this same group that believe ELL students are advancing appropriately toward graduation. This could indicate an important difference in the success teachers see in their own instruction and in their assessment of school instruction school-wide.

Comparison of Student and Staff Survey Responses

The following Table: Table VII displays the survey results for students and staff members that were discussed in the previous section:

Table VII: Student and Staff Survey Responses

	Agreement:	Low:	Neutral-Moderate:	Strong:
Quality of Instructional Program		**1,2**	**3,4**	**5,6**
1. Teacher Instruction	Students	13%	13%	74%
	Staff	20%	47%	33%
2. Teacher Caring	Students	12%	14%	74%
	Staff	7%	33%	60%
3. English Acquisition	Students	21%	20%	59%
	Staff	20%	56%	24%

	Agreement:	Low:	Neutral-Moderate:	Strong:
School Connectedness		**1,2**	**3,4**	**5,6**
1. Academic Assistance	Students	10%	29%	61%
	Staff	14%	36%	50%
2. Parent Involvement	Students	45%	34%	21%
	Staff	86%	14%	0%
3. Extra-curricular Involvement	Students	58%	17%	25%
	Staff	50%	20%	30%

	Agreement:	Low:	Neutral-Moderate:	Strong:
Self-Image and Self-Efficacy		**1,2**	**3,4**	**5,6**
1. Friendship & Peer Relations	Students	15%	15%	70%
	Staff	0%	36%	64%
2. Confidence as Scholars	Students	29%	27%	44%
	Staff	40%	40%	20%
3. Happiness	Students	22%	17%	61%
	Staff	4%	33%	63%

	Agreement:	Low:	Neutral-Moderate:	Strong:
Ongoing Progress Toward Goals		**1,2**	**3,4**	**5,6**
1. Passing Classes	Students	14%	7%	79%
	Staff	14%	50%	36%
2. Credit Accrual/	Students	10%	13%	77%
Grade Level Standing	Staff	20%	70%	10%
3. Graduation Probability	Students	39%	3%	58%
	Staff	40%	33%	27%

Similarities and Differences Between Student and Staff Responses

Quality of Instructional Programs

In general, students tended to rate the quality of the instructional programs for ELLs at Central High School much higher than staff members rated program quality. A majority of the students surveyed registered high ratings for teacher instruction, teacher caring, and for their own English acquisition. While 74% of the ELL student interviewed rated the quality of instruction as a "5" or a "6" (the highest possible rating), only 33% of the staff members interviewed rated quality of instruction so highly. The greatest percentage of staff members expressed neutrality or moderate support. Teacher caring was endorsed by both groups, although the students showed greater support than staff members in this area also, with 70% of students rating their agreement as a "5" or a "6", and 60% of staff members rating their agreement as equally strong. There was a large discrepancy between the percentages of students and the percentages of staff regarding the English acquisition of ELL students. While a majority of the student interviewed (59%) expressed that the English acquisition for ELLs is occurring very well, only 24% of the staff members interviewed ranked English acquisition success so highly.

School Connectedness

Regarding school connectedness, closely equivalent percentages of students and staff members expressed that the school provides many means of assistance to ELL students outside the classroom context. Parent involvement,

however, received far different ranking from the two groups. The greatest percentage of students responding (45%) ranked parent participation as low, but the staff group that expressed this low ranking was much larger (86%). In fact, none of the staff members surveyed (0%) rated the participation of ELL parents as high. On the issue of ELL participation in extra-curricular activities, students and staff members' responses were very similar; 58% of the students surveyed indicated low participation by ELL students, while 58% of staff members surveyed indicated this same rating.

Self-Image and Self-Efficacy

Regarding the issues of friendship and peer relations, students and staff members agreed for the most part, as 70% of the student surveyed and 64% of the staff members surveyed rated the propensity of ELL students to make and keep many friends as high. Students and staff took a different position on the concept of ELL students as confident scholars, as the greatest number of ELL students (44%) indicated that they considered themselves to be confident scholars, and only 20% of the staff members surveyed showed high agreement with this survey item. Student and staff responses to the notion as to whether ELL students are happy in school drew approximately the same high agreement from both groups (61% and 63% respectively), but many more ELL students (21% as opposed to 4% of staff members) ranked their happiness as low.

Ongoing Progress

Regarding ongoing progress toward academic and related goals, there was a large discrepancy between the percentage of staff members that indicated ELL students would pass their class(es), and the percentage of ELL students that stated they would pass all of their classes. This could be due in part to a difference in what the statements posited. While an ELL student might well pass a certain teacher's class, his likelihood of passing all classes could be lower. This begs the question, "If an ELL student can pass any one particular class, why should the other classes pose greater problems for him?" Nonetheless, staff members and students responded in the following ways: 79% of students indicated that they were very likely to pass their classes, while only 36% of the staff members supported this view. The disparity of agreement regarding credit accrual was even greater; 77% of students surveyed expressed that they are accruing credits on time, while only 10% of the staff members agreed that most ELLs are accruing credits in a timely manner.

Regarding the probability of graduation, the majority of ELL students and staff members surveyed indicated that most ELL students will graduate high school; 58% of the students surveyed and 73% of the staff members surveyed ranked their agreement as strong. However, the next largest percentage for both groups expressed low agreement with the notion that most ELL students will graduate. 39% of ELL students and 40% of ELL staff rated their agreement with this statement as a "1" or a "2".

The following chapter, Chapter VI discusses the responses of students and staff members to the interview questions. Many of the same sentiments, points of agreement, and issues of disagreement that were expressed in the survey responses are echoed in the interview commentary.

CHAPTER VI: STUDENT AND STAFF INTERVIEWS

Overview

In this chapter, I explore the student and staff responses to the qualitative portion of the study represented by the interview questions. The interview questions concerned the four dimensions of the ELL Lived Reality that this dissertation purports relate to overall student success. Each question set was designed to "get at" three critical aspects of a particular dimension, and to elicit as much student dialogue as the students and staff members wished to contribute.

I first discuss and summarize the student responses to the interview questions, delineated by dimension. Student responses appear in English only for the convenience of the reader; commentary that was actually given in Spanish is framed by parentheses. Subsequently, I summarize and discuss the staff interview responses. Finally, I compare similarities and differences between student and staff interviews.

Conveying the Spirit of Student Interviews

The greatest challenge in relating the students' interview responses was to capture the receptiveness that the ELL students displayed. There was no pretense with these students, or extensive complaints, though questions posited to them covered an array of topics that could have elicited negative sentiments. Many students were willing to wait hours for their "turns". While the researcher strained to record and understand some Spanish vocabulary and phraseology, the

students patiently assisted. Repeatedly, students expressed appreciation for their personal opportunity to participate and for the research focus: The ELL Lived Reality.

Student Responses Regarding Quality of Instructional Programs

Strengths and Weaknesses of Instructional Programs

The first questions in this section were, "What are the strengths and weaknesses of this school's instructional programs (example: course work and curriculum) for ELL students?" and "What improvements would you recommend?" These questions elicited much positive commentary in support of the Central High School instructional programs for ELL students. Just as the survey responses indicated that nearly seventy-five percent of ELL students believe that instructional quality is good, and that teachers care, interview responses support that view:

> I mean, I'm one of those (ELL students), so--for me--I can tell you the ESOL teachers have done a pretty good job for me. My ninth grade, they helped me a lot. In my English classes, every day I would study hard. For me, they tried to keep track of me after I left those classes. They would still ask me how I was doing in those classes. If I need help any time, I could stop by those classes.

Although students generally expressed the opinion that the Newcomer program is working effectively for them and for their ELL friends or classmates, respondents were divided as to whether the use of Spanish in the classroom is beneficial or harmful to ELL students. This division in student opinion echoes the

research debate as to whether use of native or first language enhances or delays other learning:

> The good thing is that the ESOL teachers make the ESOL students speak English instead of Spanish (or whatever their language is). At the same time, it's a bad thing because we don't know English yet, so how we can communicate or how we can understand homework and projects? I don't know.

Some students specifically related English acquisition to English interaction and practice as these comments express. One student suggested that an "obligation" to speak English would result in faster English acquisition:

> I think it would be better if the second year that we are in school they would change us to regular classes because--in my opinion--I think that the students will try to learn English, and they will learn English faster, if they have to speak it. They will be obligated. I think if that would happen to me, I would already speak more English, and more fluently. Well, I have been in the United States for four years, so I don't think my English is good enough.

Teaching Approaches

The second questions in this segment were: "Do you feel that teaching approaches here are working with ELL students? Particularly, which ones?" Student responses to this question were often brief, but very specific. Several students mentioned that the use of visual aides enhances instruction; others noted effective approaches that included presenting material in a variety of ways, assigning group work, using picture illustrations for vocabulary, and giving concrete examples during instruction. The brevity of many students' responses (e.g. a simple "Yes" or "No" to a question with several possible answers) may have indicated that the students were sometimes unsure what constitutes "teaching

approaches", or that they may not know how to gauge if teaching approaches are working well.

Students did not separate their views of teachers and teaching inside the ESOL program—and teachers and teaching outside of the ESOL program on these particular questions. However, further into the interviews, some respondents did indicate different perceptions regarding the effort and effectiveness of ESOL and non-ESOL teachers. One student describes being confused by different teaching approaches for TAKS essay writing. The following observations indicate two students' views of certain instructional practices:

> I think that if teachers write everything they say, maybe some students can learn more. If they see, they learn more than if they hear. To learn English--I don't know--I think it's better if the teachers make like a chart or some kind of visual to help us.

> In my freshman year, it was pretty hard. Everyone was picking on me, so I couldn't wait to learn English. But--now--talking Spanish is hard. But, the teachers confused me because last year, I had Ms. "X", and Ms. "X" said something, then Ms. "Y" said something different. So, you know--I was confused. I had to do the essay for the TAKS Test. They helped me because I had to learn a lot. But, they're confused.

Instructional Materials

The last questions in this section regarded quality of teaching materials and other resources for students. These were important questions as the quantity and quality of teaching materials are factors that are often within the control of the school organization—attainable through purchase or collaboration. The

questions, “Do your teachers utilize adequate and effective teaching materials?” and “What additional resources or materials would you recommend?” could be difficult to answer for students who might have little knowledge of alternative teaching materials that they may have never seen. However, some students were very specific in their experiences and preferences. Overall, students expressed that in many cases teaching materials were inadequate, despite conscientious efforts of teachers to create effective lesson supports. Several students used qualifiers such as “sometimes”, “algunas veces”, and “depends” indicating a variation among teachers. Several students also expressed a preference for textbooks or supplementary books as their preferred study resources:

> (The materials are good, but--in this school--it depends on the teacher.)

> Some of them have adequate materials, because in some of my English classes, they don’t have any books. We don’t have books like for reading and all that. The district has not given books to my teachers, and they always scheme so they can teach us. My teacher has to invent every day what he’s going to teach us. He doesn’t think he has the tools so we can learn more English quickly. So…some of them do; some of them don’t.

Student Responses Regarding School Connectedness

School Environment

The second question set addressed the idea of school connectedness. The first question in this portion specifically dealt with the school environment: “What is the school environment (culture, climate, daily experience) like for you and for other ELL students? Please explain.” This question received greater student responses than any other, possibly because it concerned a subject the

students are very familiar with—their own daily experiences, while other questions dealt with what the teachers or what the school organization is doing. For the most part, respondents indicated that the culture at Central High School is friendly and supportive. According to many ELL students interviewed, the presence of other Spanish speakers and students of like cultures helps create an atmosphere of acceptance, and allows for ongoing communication. Several students also praised the presence of Spanish speaking classroom teachers. Some students alluded to feeling safe, feeling good at school, and "not having any problems". The following are student comments suggesting that the Central High School environment is a positive one:

> (The teachers are great, and the students too, and the principal. They are all a team that works together. They give the ESL students a lot of opportunities. I'm also thankful because in here I learn English. I feel good here because I feel safe. I feel comfortable with my friends, and I feel like that I am already in a place where I like it. I really feel good when I get here.)

> Well, I like my school. I think that it's real cool; I like it. I enjoy it so much. I'm really involved in activities. Thanks to Mr. "X", I've been learning a lot of English, and all the stuff. And, I think it's safe. It is a safe school; I feel safe.

Another predominant theme in the students' commentary was their observations of diversity and harmony among student groups. Several students noted that there are many cultures at Central High School, and that these different cultures co-exist very well. Few students expressed any dissonance or conflict among groups, although two students did indicate that they feel Immigrant

students are looked down upon. The following student comments summarize what many students expressed as cultural harmony or absence of conflict:

> (Well, the programs here are good, and they do a lot for the Spanish students. The environment of this school is good; it is a school where there are not many problems.)
>
> School is super cool--lots of different cultures, different ethnicities, "diversidades" (diversity).

A few students indicated some social problems related to culture or language. These included not having Spanish speaking teachers to assist with tutoring, and the view that the school environment can be somewhat strange for Newcomer students. However, no students indicated that they had ever been overwhelmed, even as Newcomers. The following are excerpts from the students' responses regarding specific perceptions of the school environment:

> (Well, school is very good, although there are other people that do not see us as equal. By "us", I mean the Immigrant students), But, sometimes they do not help us enough with what we need. The culture—the environment—are a little strange as a way to educate someone who doesn't understand English well.)
>
> Sometimes the students are the ones who are on the negative side. The staff, they're pretty awesome; they help you a lot. The students—they look at different sides.

Extra-Curricular Involvement

The next question in the series was, "What do you see as enablers or barriers to your participation in extra-curricular activities?" Responses to this question varied, but many of the first students interviewed did not appear to understand the question. When the question was rephrased to ask, "Do you

participate in extra-curricular activities?" responses increased. Most of the students interviewed indicated that they do not currently participate in extra-curricular activities, but most students further indicated that they had participated—particularly during their first year. Those who expressed current participation mentioned two types of activities—clubs whose membership is primarily ELL students--and sports. Students spoke with pride about their accomplishments in these two realms:

> (I used to play soccer, and it was very fun. It was the first year; we were the district champions.)
>
> I am in the International Club, and I was in the Spanish Club; these are the best things about my school.

Some students indicated that they or their friends did participate in extra-curricular activities at one time, but "aged out" by exceeding University Interscholastic League age guidelines for participating. The following student commentary alludes to the effects of age restrictions for UIL governed activities:

> I was actually doing extra-curricular activities, but then--because of my age--I couldn't play anymore. Actually, I joined the football team just to challenge myself—not physically, but mentally. It gave me confidence, you know physically and mentally. My position had to learn the plays, so it was real challenging. I was a quarterback.
>
> (For me, now, I don't know. I have been here in school for four years, and I have not been in any activities. But, my brother wanted to; he cannot because he is nineteen years old, and they will not allow it.)

The most common barriers to participation that students cited were related to communication issues or economics. The majority of interviewees indicated

that they (along with many of their friends) are employed outside the school day, and several students stated that they work more than one job. Other students noted that they assist with siblings, or do not have the transportation necessary to attend practices, meetings, and games. The following student comments illustrate the effects of economic constraints on their ability to participate in extra-curricular activities:

> (Well, most students—um--Spanish speakers--have to work after school. Because most of them help their families, they have to work after school. I think that's the reason they don't participate. I work on the week-ends. If I didn't work, I would participate in activities.)

> (After school, the problem is "rides", but yes, I want to play soccer. There are many students who don't participate after school or on the week-ends because of "rides" or work.)

Most students mentioned, however, that not receiving adequate information to always know what programs are offered and what specific events are occurring presented a greater barrier than work responsibilities. According to one very vocal student, the ELL students are isolated in portable buildings for several classes, many of which do not have televisions necessary to receive the daily announcements. In addition, this student stated, teachers do not always share information about extra-curricular opportunities, as they are too busy teaching their classes. Some students responded that they do not participate in extracurricular activities because they do not know English, and for that reason they are hesitant or "afraid" to participate. Lack of information was a major problem voiced by many students:

> Well, in our school one of the major barriers that I have seen-- that I've talked to many guys so that they can do something about it-- but they don't do it—is: We do not receive the other information that the other students receive in school. The students are isolated—outside. Nobody cares about us. I am sure they do, but we are outside. Like now--That's one of the things that I am fighting against. The students are not receiving the same information that other students are receiving. All year, there are opportunities we do not know until three weeks later. That's why sometimes some of the students don't really go, because they are not receiving enough information.

Parent Participation

The last questions in the interview segment concerned the level of parent participation that students experience personally or observe with their friends. The response to these questions was huge. The questions posed to students were, "Do your parents/guardians participate in school activities/events as much as they would like to?", and "What could improve their opportunities to participate?" Overwhelmingly, students indicated that their parents are quite interested in their scholastic performance and progress, and many recounted close dialogue between themselves and their parents regarding their school performance. The following student commentary illustrates this perspective:

> (Well, sometimes they participate, but not when they have to work. But when they can, they come. My mother is always asking me about school, and how I do, and college.
>
> Yes, they attend to see how I am--so they keep up with how I do in class; they keep up with my grades. Sometimes, they come to the office. Sometimes, Ms. "X" talks to them about me; she speaks Spanish.

Major barriers to parent participation that the students mentioned were language barriers--lack of Spanish speaking school personnel, too little communication between school and home, and limited English proficiency of parents. However, students expressed many creative ideas that could boost parent participation. These included on site English lessons for adults, employing translators for meetings, expanding the number and nature of school activities to include camps and student/parent cooperative events, and extending personal "invitations" to meetings--in Spanish and in English--rather than merely sending announcements in English:

> (The school can present the information in their own language so they can understand, and attend, and participate. And--I don't know--they would be interested in the school if they were invited.
>
> We could have more meetings with parents, to help the Spanish parents to understand how the school works and other stuff, so they will be able to help. In the beginning, my mother could not read the report card. For those that do not know English, they could teach English here; my parents are interested in learning English.

Two other significant barriers to parent participation that students perceived were outside responsibilities (such as work requirements or care of children) and lack of school/home communication. Some students stated that both parents had to work or that their only parent was employed. Four of the students mentioned that parents who work are too tired to participate in school activities. This commentary illustrates that viewpoint:

> My mom does not really participate because she has to work. And we're living out of the rent house. She is very tired, so she cannot come up here and attend activities.

Some students recommended improving communication in general—communication to students and communication with parents. One very vocal student leader suggested that both the school and the students should share the responsibility for improving communication with parents; while students could take more responsibility for informing their parents, the school could communicate directly with parents rather than relying on the students to always take the initiative:

> When they know the information, they do participate. I know many students that receive papers about a meeting or something like that, and many students do not show that to their parents. So their parents do not get involved in what's going on, and I'm sure it's because they do not know about it; it's not because they don't care. And that's another problem that we have going on --that we do not know how to communicate with the parents. Our students don't do enough. I think one way to improve communication that we discuss in my Leadership Council is that we have to send communication directly many times.

Student Responses Regarding Self-Image and Self-Efficacy

Happiness in School

The next group of questions addressed the idea of student self-image and self-efficacy, and specifically concerned issues of student happiness, student confidence, and students' inclination to act on their own behalves in seeking extra help for academics. The first questions were complex, as they asked students to consider their own perspectives toward happiness in school, and then to consider the perspectives of other ELL students: "Overall, are you happy in this high school? Please explain.", and "Do you feel most ELL students are happy at this

high school?" Why do you think so/not?" A large majority of students indicated that they are happy in school. The response to these questions and to this question set overall was not as strong or as detailed as responses that concerned the school environment or that regarded parent involvement possibilities, but there were a considerable number of thoughtful responses.

The definition of happiness that students expressed was somewhat different from the staff interviewees' concept of student happiness, and often related closely to the presence of friends or the absence of conflict. The following student commentary supports the view that most ELL students at Central High School are generally happy in school:

> (I have been here for three years, and I haven't got any problems with anybody. I don't have a lot of friends, but I don't have any problems. We have a lot of Hispanic population, so many of us speak Spanish. That is one of the good things, we are comfortable because we can speak with people in our native language. It is a good school.)

> Yeah, I am very happy here, and I think most of my friends are happy here also. I feel like everybody--they have friends that speak Spanish, so they are. When I started my freshman year, everything had to be in English. That was really hard, but I learned really fast.

These responses contradict the presumptions that attaining happiness in school is difficult for many ELLs. However, many students did mention that not all ELLs attend school regularly or do well academically. According to some student' commentary, school success is a function of attendance, effort, or level of English acquisition. Most ELL students reported that their initial enrollment period in school was more difficult, but improved over time. A small number of

students expressed that they are not happy, or that they are only somewhat or sometimes happy.

Confidence as Scholars

The second questions in this set concerned student confidence in academics. Students were asked, "Do you feel confident as a scholar?", and "Are you comfortable participating and interacting in class?" A large majority (sixteen out of twenty) ELL students stated that they are confident as scholars, and that they do feel comfortable participating freely in class. These responses were in contrast to what much of the research literature suggests regarding Newcomer students' hesitance to participate fully in class or in the larger school environment. Many of the student responses were simply "Yes" or "Si" without further elaboration, but most responses confirm scholastic confidence:

> (In this school, this is my first year. I feel like my friends and my teachers have been doing a great job because it is my first year here, and I already feel very comfortable.)
>
> Of course, I do feel comfortable. Well, the good think is that you begin a new language, but I think the bad thing is they should have more activities for the students to interact. We're really needing to interact with other people and practice our English outside.

Several students indicated that their confidence had evolved or improved as they learned more English and gained experience in high school. Others stated that their confidence was situational—depending on the teacher or on the class dynamics. Some student commentary supports the idea that confidence is more fluid than constant:

> (It depends on the way the teacher treats us sometimes, but—yes, I am very comfortable in working. To be honest, I was kind of afraid, but now making friends helped me to survive.)
>
> At first when I came here, I just don't like to talk too much because nobody can understand my English. I didn't like to participate in class, but now I know what they're talking about.

Seeking and Securing Extra Help

The final questions in this series concerned students' willingness to seek, and ability to secure supplemental assistance with their studies. Students were asked: "Do you often seek and secure extra help here?" and, "If not, why not?" Student responses to these queries varied. While almost all students indicated that opportunities are available for extra assistance, few students reported that they take advantage of these opportunities. Some students did not identify or articulate just why they did not seek extra help; they simply answered, "No". Those that did indicate that they receive out-of-class assistance in academics offered accolades in support of their teachers' efforts to assist them personally. One student asserted that assistance varied among teachers, while another student suggested that ELL students should be allowed to assist one another at times:

> Teachers are very willing—yes, especially Ms. "X" and Mr. "Y"; and Ms. "Z" helps me with Biology, and she's not even teaching Biology. When I was in ninth grade, she helped me because she learned about Biology.
>
> Sometimes I can get help, and help others. Like last year, I got World History. And, I don't know English, but my friends were talking to me in Spanish, and I was talking to them in Spanish. The teacher said, "You go, guys." But, if we don't know English, how are we going to do the test? So, I was helping them.

Student Responses Regarding Ongoing Progress

Passing Classes

The fourth question set concerned the idea of ongoing progress toward goals such as passing coursework, advancing to the next grade level, graduating from high school, and continuing education beyond high school. After concluding the interviews, it became clear that one valuable question should have directly addressed the TAKS Exams that students must take and pass to graduate. Since this question was not stated explicitly, references to TAKS and its affect on student graduation chances came forth in some-but not all--student conversations. The first questions in the series addressed the students' possibility of or fear of failing courses they were currently taking. Students were asked: "Are you concerned you may not pass your course work this year?", and "If you do not pass, how will this affect you?" Many of the students responded that either B.C.I.S. (Business Computer Information Systems) or I.P.C. (Integrated Physics and Chemistry) was their most difficult subject. When asked the effects they would suffer if these courses were not passed, the most common answers were, "I will fail the grade level" or "I will not graduate":

> I was worried about one of my classes. It was B.C.I.S. (Business Information Computer Systems), and one of the problems was the communication with the teacher. Maybe this is going to make a contradiction, but because of the language, I almost failed that class. But I did my best, and I passed. In the end, if we don't try to do it, and we don't learn English, then we're not going to do it.

> I have to pass IPC, and I have only half of my credit all because of Ms. "X". She changed my grade in the first half of the course. I'm—like--"Why, Miss?" Sometimes I was late coming to my class. I had a picture of the Mexican flag, and I put it in my book. I don't know why, but she didn't like it, and she said, "Put it away.' I don't know why.

Accruing Credits

The second question in the series addressed over age as it may relate to academic or other problems. Students were asked: "If you are over age in your particular grade level or in a particular course, does this pose problems for you? Explain." Because many ELL students are over age, and because being over age is so closely linked to school drop out, this question represented a critical aspect of the research. Most of the ELL students stated that being over age is neither a problem for the individual student nor a problem for others. The following student commentary supports this view:

> (No, I don't think it is a problem. I have friends that are already eighteen years old or older, and they pass and converse well.)

> No, I don't think that causes any problem. No, I think sometimes we can learn from them—from older students.

However, several students did mention some specific effects of over age that either affected them or other ELL students. Some students expressed the concern that being over age prevents students from participating in UIL-sanctioned extra-curricular activities. For some of the students, their participation in sports was curtailed either early on because they were overage as freshman or at the senior level when they reached age nineteen.

> Actually over age is not usually a problem; I mean--for me--I guess like in football. If I would have turned eighteen after September, I could have played. So, I turned nineteen before September, and I did not get to play.
>
> (I'm going to be twenty years old. In the beginning, like this year, I wanted to be in soccer, and in this school, I couldn't do it because of UIL rules. I couldn't be over eighteen, so I couldn't do it.)

Some students indicated that they know ELL students who are in danger of not graduating or have "dropped out", while other ELL classmates have been successful academically. According to the student responses, much depends on student choice and determination:

> (It is mostly up to the student. A lot of Spanish people sometimes think that we cannot make it. We just drop out, but that's not the better way. Sometimes, teachers motivate you to encourage you to get out of high school. For me--If I don't pass, it will affect me a great deal because I have my plans.)
>
> I have got friends who are over age. For most of us, it doesn't matter that much, but--you know--a lot of people are skipping; it's their decision.

Graduation and Post-Secondary Education

The final questions in this particular interview segment concerned students' graduation chances and plans for post-secondary schooling. Students were asked, "Do you expect to graduate high school?", "Do you expect to continue schooling beyond high school?", and "What do you think the expectations are for ELL students in these areas?" Overall, almost all students stated that they did expect to graduate high school, and well over half indicated that they had post-secondary college or career expectations. Of those students,

almost all expressed their desire to attend local community college first and four-year college afterward. When asked what course of study they would pursue, most students did have a career envisioned; these included: Police Officer, Teacher, Psychologist, Computer Scientist, and Biologist. Many students were less specific about their professional goals, but still indicated they did want to attend some form of college:

> Yes, I am planning to graduate. After graduation, I am planning to go to the university. I'm sure it's going to be in Mexico. But, I know I am going to become a lawyer.

> I want to go to college. I went to Baylor, and I liked it. And, I got a letter from Baylor. Because—like, two years ago--Do you know Mr. "X"? He got a trip to Baylor and I went with him, because I know the computer. I graduated in computer class--A+ computers. And, now I want to get the two year college degree. I will maybe go back to Mexico; they have Dell—the most important computers in Mexico. And they have everything like here, but they pay less. If you know English, then you should go here. But, you can go there.

When asked what specific steps they had taken to prepare for their post-secondary choices, however, very few students indicated that they had completed the steps for college admission, or even know how to do so. Some senior students expressed that their college plans would be contingent upon passing TAKS Exams:

> Before, I was planning to go to college; but now I'm having a kind of trouble. I'm probably going to start working this summer or the whole year, but—definitely--I want to go to college. Another thing I have to do is pass the TAKS Tests; I have to pass to graduate.

> I already applied for colleges, but I guess my applications were incomplete. My residence status for one, and I guess an essay; those are the things I need.

Student Interview Responses to Open-ended Questions

Variation in ELL Success

The two final questions in the interview protocol were designed to relate in a more indirect or general way to the topics addressed in the focused question sets. By going through the thinking processes in answering previous questions, students might better make deductions as to the impact of particular programs, policies, and practices in their lives. Therefore, the last two questions were more general, and more open-ended. Students were asked, "Some ELL students are more successful in school than others. Why do you think this is so?"

The primary reason that students cited for variance in ELL achievement and success was student effort as reflected by behaviors such as attendance, completion of class work, willingness to practice English, and cooperation with teachers. According to many interviewees, the responsibility for learning belongs to the students themselves, and caring is a personal enterprise. The following student commentary supports the view that students' academic behavior such as maintaining responsible work habits is sometimes the strongest determinant student success. One student states, "There are two ways of looking at it—the way":

> (I think that if they don't attend class, they will learn less than the students that are here and that do their work. Some are just not interested in school--maybe because some of them give up quicker. There are two ways of looking at it—the way.)

(It depends on how you try to learn. Some students do not think about their futures. But, me-- I'm graduating in a year. Some students make it because they know the teachers. They want to get their degree.

(Some people--they just don't think. I was talking to my friends, and they said, "Maybe you can go to college." So, I think I am.)

Other students expressed that English language facility—the amount of English a student knows, and how quickly he progresses in English--affect attitudes toward school. According to some interviewees, once behind in their studies, many ELL students tend to give up hope. According to these students, the teachers and the school can mean the difference in success and failure for many ELL students:

Well, some students care and want to learn English, and some students don't. Some students take it easy because they know they receive a lot of help in Spanish. So, again, I think that is one of the things that I say: I think that they should change ESOL to regular English because students feel relaxed because they don't have to learn.

(I think that the teachers teach us in different ways, and that some students become more advanced than others. Because we always see that when we can learn, we are successful and want to speak the language.)

Additional Information Students Wished to Offer

At the close of the interviews, students were given the opportunity to augment their responses to previous questions by adding any information they chose. Most students took the opportunity to add some final commentary. In answering, "Is there anything you would like to add?", most students endorsed instructional programs for ELL students at Central High School, and expressed

the view that caring teachers (particularly the ESOL teachers) are a major reason that ELL students succeed. Many students also cited their own growth in English proficiency. The following student commentary indicates this high level of support:

> It's cool here, you know--cool teachers. Ms. "X" is cool—Ms. "Y". Teachers know me because when I am talking to them, they listen. You know Mr. "Z"? He's a good teacher too.
>
> (I can say that at the beginning it was hard to me because I didn't know English or understand, but--you know--I've been learning. I think that I've been helped a lot from my teachers and from friends. I owe the ESOL program a lot).

Several students did offer specific recommendations; chief among these was improving communication with ELL students and with their parents. One suggestion was to relocate the ELL classrooms from the portable buildings into the main school structure. Other suggestions were that the school could provide more informational functions for parents, conduct meetings in English and Spanish, and provide on-site English classes for adults. Another recommendation involved decreasing the amount of Spanish used in instruction.

Regarding upcoming or rumored program changes, however, several students expressed concern for the future. The following student comments reflect these views and opinions regarding communication:

> I already said that I think communication is one of the most important things that I think our school is depending on—the communication between the students and parents.
>
> I think that ESL students would be with the other students, not isolated. We learn more if we be with the people that speak

> English, not just our own language--because we would learn how the program works. I don't know; it's so different for us.

There was some disagreement among students as to whether teaching or assisting ELL students in Spanish is a burden or a benefit. However, most interviewees took the position that first languages should be used only in limited ways to assist students. Some students cautioned that placing ELL students in regular English classes rather than in ESOL classes could create difficulties for some English Language Learners. The following student commentary expresses opposing views of what proper program design should be for ELLs:

> (Well, I think that the ESL program is good for many of the students, and that the teachers are good. One teacher teaches us everything in Spanish. It helps us, but I don't like it because we need English. The teachers are good teachers, and they do not do anything wrong. We have confidence in them.)

> (The rumor is that the ESL program is going to change. If that happens, and ESL is going to be only for ELL students in their first year, and ELL students are going to be in regular English classes, I believe that many students will not want to come to school.)

The Staff Interview Responses

A formidable challenge in conducting the staff interviews was asking precisely the same questions of staff members that were posed to students. The interview instruments were first constructed from the students' viewpoint to capture their experiences without trying to make their views or recollections conform to adult perspectives; and were then trans-adapted for staff members. While students were asked to consider their own perspectives as well as the experiences of their friends and classmates, staff members were asked to consider

the performance of ELL students in the aggregate, their own effectiveness as teachers or education professionals, and the performance of the school organization as a whole.

Staff Responses Regarding Quality of Instructional Programs

Strengths and Weaknesses of Instructional Programs

Staff members were first asked: "What are the strengths and weaknesses of this high school's instructional program (example: course work and curriculum) for ELL students?", and "What improvements would you recommend?" These turned out to be questions with a broad range of responses. Generally, staff members expressed the opinion that programs for ELL students are improving. Quality teaching was a predominant observation. Other common themes expressed were: difficulty in maintaining communication between ESOL teachers and general education teachers, apprehension regarding the future schema ESOL, and concerns about differences in the support afforded to Newcomer students and support given to advancing ELL students.

Concerning program improvements, teachers indicated that some structures were already in place, but at the same time acknowledged the tremendous task of ensuring that Newcomer students develop sufficient English language skills, and master standard grade level curriculum all in a short time. The following commentary references this challenge:

> We have been planning with the English department for a while, and that helps build some structures in that sense. However, we have to realize that we're dealing with basic vocabulary issues. Many times we don't spend as much time as we should because we still have to make sure that they are covering certain materials from the English Language environment.

"Giving" or "having" the proper amount of time to spend with individual student needs was a concern that many teachers mentioned. The following staff commentary alludes to learning gaps, the need for scaffolding to bridge these gaps, and the amount of time it realistically takes for a student to develop sufficient English to meet classroom expectations:

> Approaches are not working, and it's precisely because of the amount of time that we are not allocating to educating the students. We are hitting and missing quite a bit. We have unrealistic expectations of what our kids can accomplish. Some do blossom and live up to the expectations, but the reality is that the great majority of them don't, and that is eventually seen when they cannot pass the TAKS the first or the second time around.

According to one ESOL teacher, policies that place ELL students in certain initial courses or advance students course to course or grade to grade without requisite skills do not serve ELL students well. According to this teacher, ELL students are often placed in courses they cannot succeed in, and then moved from level to level without really mastering the knowledge and skills that courses are designed to develop. Thus, curriculum policy for ELL students might be rigorous, but curriculum practice might not always reflect that same rigor:

> Our curriculum for ELLs is not what I consider to be standard practices in terms of scaffolding--taking a student from where they are and allowing the opportunities for them to move to the next level. The students are being placed in the correct grade, or in ninth grade, or in tenth grade or in English III with no skills to

> support them. I think that we are moving them from one class to another; and, then they get to me, and my job is to get them to graduate by passing the English TAKS. I am facing severe deficits in learning that should not be at that level.

Another teacher voiced concerns for a specific group within the ELL population that she considers the most critical—Students Without Prior Education—or SIPE—students. Another staff member endorsed the idea that the program for Newcomer students is strong, but that less support is available to advanced or veteran students. The following staff commentary indicates concerns for these two ELL subgroups:

> We have nothing geared toward the group with no formal education—the group that they are now calling "SIPE". Those kids, even though they might see me two or three periods a week to work on second grade math, are still in Algebra the other days. A student from Liberia (for example) who's never seen a computer may be enrolled in B.C.I.S. (Business Computer Information Skills) instead of Keyboarding.

> We don't offer any assistance, specifically for students that have been here for two years. So, a five year ELL or a long-term ELL is not getting anything after year two or year three.

Teaching Approaches

In response to whether or not teaching approaches are working well for ELL students, almost all interviewees mentioned that the programs for ELL students are in a period of change, and that teaching approaches are improving. However, program structure including course sequence was mentioned by interviewees many times:

> We have to acknowledge where our kids are starting, fill in the gaps, and move forward. I find it weird that we are actually pushing the ELLs out the door, encouraging them to take ESOL III in the summer, right after ESL II, which is not adequate learning. Or—worse yet—we will put them in English III and IV simultaneously, after being in ESOL II for just a few months. In the fall, they fail. I'll say, "Why don't we just put them in English III and Reading or English IV and Reading?" I have been told many times they "don't have room" for Reading. My response is, "Do they have room to fail?"

Instructional Materials

When asked, "Are adequate resources available to assist you in ESL instruction?", and "What do you need most in this area?", staff members offered varied responses. Several teachers noted that resources are "out there", but that finding them is extremely time consuming, but that there is not always a great deal of direction in finding and acquiring them. One teacher stated that, in regard to materials, teachers, "lack, lack, lack". One teacher referred to herself as the "Xerox Queen", noting that for English instruction there are no materials to adequately bridge students' beginning skill levels with terminal objectives. Others teachers mentioned the difficulty in blending resources to provide cohesive instruction:

> I think we have some resources. I won't call them adequate at all because of the issue of planning. If we don't have a consistent plan, we can't really use consistent resources. We have technology, but it's disconnected from our lesson plans. There are so many disconnected parts of the whole picture. We can say we have tons of stuff in the classroom, but how productive is it to use bits and pieces, if it's not in a cohesive manner?

Staff Responses Regarding School Connectedness

School Environment

The second question set addressed school connectedness—participation, communication, involvement in school life out side the classroom. The first question was "What is this school environment (culture, climate, daily experience) like for ELL students? Please explain." A majority of staff members responded that they felt the school environment was overwhelming for Newcomers, but friendly and supportive once ELL students completed their initial period of enrollment, developed relationships, and learned how vital school systems work. "Overwhelming", "frustrating", "isolating" and "inconsistent" were used to describe the environment for Newcomer students. One staff member estimated that perhaps 30%-40% of ELL students make the interpersonal connections they need to be happy; another staff member stated the Newcomer students are "in a terrible position":

> I feel that—for ELL students—their environment here is inconsistent. I think they feel really safe in some places, and in other places, I think they feel lost or ignored. I think sometimes they feel uncomfortable in speaking out when they're surrounded in a class where everybody's different. But they have lots to say when they're together, they have lots to share. Adjustment depends on making connections.

Extra-Curricular Participation

The next question addressed participation in extra-curricular activities such as athletics. When asked, "What do you see as enablers or barriers to ELL students' participation in extra-curricular activities?" most staff members

indicated a low degree of participation for ELL students. Some staff members referenced economics and family obligations including responsibilities such as employment, care of siblings, and care of their own children:

> Some of it stems from the fact that our students have so many burdens and so many responsibilities. Just today I had to call two students who I know had to change apartments four times in the past two-three weeks because mother and father were fighting. Mother had to go to work, so one kid had to stay home to baby-sit and the other had to go to work. So much is going on with their lives right now; it's amazing that they would actually come in here.

Staff members also mentioned poor communication, academic eligibility, transportation issues, and fear of trying the unknown. Several interviewees offered specific examples of the need to actively recruit ELL students:

> We just don't go out a recruit them. There are a bunch of kiddos that play soccer outside my window, and they're good. And finally, last week, the soccer coach went up and said, "You guys need to come play; you need to come sign up". For some kids, the barriers are that they've never played the sport before.

Parent Participation

A third question addressing school connectedness was: "Compared with other ELL students, does ELL parents/guardians participate in school events/activities more, less, or about the same?" Resoundingly, staff members reported that ELL parents and guardians are not visible at school and not active overall in the schooling process. The primary reasons cited were lack of English facility and economic constraints such as the employment demands or lack or transportation.

One interviewee mentioned the idea that some ELL parent may not actively participate in school functions because they trust the school organization to make prudent decisions and to solve problems. The majority of staff members interviewed expressed that school efforts were inconsistent or ineffective:

> My parents tell me they're not participating because of the language issue. They're not familiar with the whole system and how it works. I think it's also the way the school system is being perceived by so many people who are coming from other places. "How am I going to speak with them? I'm speaking in another language". They are not coming; they are not showing their faces. It's not there.

Staff Responses Regarding ELL Student Self-image and Self-efficacy

Happiness in School

The next segment of interview questions involved the idea of student self-image and self-efficacy. The first questions in this section concerned overall happiness in school for ELL students: "Do you feel most ELL students are happy in this high school?", and "Why do you think so/not?" Most staff members suggested that Newcomers often find the school environment overwhelming and frustrating, and therefore would have difficulty being happy. Most also suggested that happiness is a function of time, developing as ELLs acquired English and establish friendships:

> Once they can actually understand the system, I do believe that they get to that point where they are happy and content with it. It's unrealistic to think that they are happy the first week because they are more confused than anything else, and we can see their "deer eyes". But, second semester, I can usually see most if them smiling and joking around.

By and large, the staff members expressed that the Spanish speaking ELL students have a better chance for happiness in school than non-Spanish speaking ELLs because of camaraderie and support from other students. Other staff commentary concerned the definition of "happiness". One teacher indicated that ELL students sometimes feel unsafe, and another interviewee suggested that the students' concept of happiness was sometimes skewed because low expectations that may give students a false sense of accomplishment. One teacher termed happiness "a delusion" for some ELL students because they are unaware of how much work is ordinarily required for academic success. The following commentary reflects that perspective:

> I guess maybe 15% of the kids are happy. When I talk to my "kiddos" about what do they like about their year here or their years here, they seem all right with it, but then later on we'll talk about things, and they worry about a lot. Also, they often do not know exactly how hard they should be working for success because standards are sometimes set too low for them. So, happiness--in a way--is a delusion.

Confidence as Scholars

The second question concerned the confidence students felt or exhibited. "How would you compare the confidence your ELL students have in themselves as scholars with the confidence of non-ELL students? Give examples (including interactions)." The majority of the respondents indicated that ELL students, especially beginners, display less confidence than English-fluent students. They cited specific observations that led to this view:

> I think the English Language Learner students invariably have less confidence, and often they are very open about that. They articulate it very often to me. ELL students that are not passing classes are less likely to ask questions, less likely to come to tutoring, and even less likely to ask a friend for help.

Just as staff members stated that student happiness improved over time, student self-confidence was also linked to experience. Some staff members described Newcomer confidence levels as "shaky", desperate" or "insecure". Many staff members mentioned the role that teachers should play in building student confidence. One idea was to provide information to students early on as to who does what in the school organization, where things are located, and how systems work. Other staff members stressed the constant need to provide praise and encouragement. One teacher suggested taking action to get ELL students involved:

> If we keep letting them choose--for the most part--they'll keep saying, "Oh, no, no, no." Sometimes, you have to force them at first to be involved. If we say, "Come with me, come on over here, and you're going to do this for the next week; stand over here, and we'll stand here with you and do these things", then later on they figure out, "O.K., this is fun". That builds their self-esteem. But, many times we accept it as no, they really don't want to.

Seeking and Securing Extra Help

The third questions concerned their tendency to seek extra help such as through tutoring: "Do ELL students often seek and secure extra help here? If so, how do you know? If not, why do you think this is so?" Most staff members considered ELL students less inclined to secure additional aid with their studies.

Some teachers stressed their own individual efforts to assist students, and reported equivalent participation between ELLs and non-ELLs. Other teachers indicated that Newcomer students do not seek extra help because most staff members speak only English:

> Maybe if we connected it with their level of achievement in the classroom--or if we would give them some extra points for attending the tutoring--that would go farther. Some who have gone to tutoring have said, "Well, Miss, there is no one who can help me in Spanish. Why should I go?"
>
> I don't think that many ELL students seek additional help. I think especially if they feel their teacher is not going to be able to be patient with them and struggle with the language barrier in the classroom, then that would translate into not struggling after hours.

Staff Responses Regarding Ongoing Progress

Passing Classes

The fourth set of questions addressed the idea of ongoing progress. The question set began with the narrowest or more personal application of academic progress—passing an individual course, then expanded to implications of advancing in grade, then extrapolated to completion of high school and college attendance. The first question in the interview set asked staff members to compare the probability of ELL students passing their course(s) with the probability of non-ELL students passing. Most teachers indicated that ELL students' probability of passing their classes was lower than that of non-ELL students. One teacher mentioned designing projects or structuring grades so that struggling ELLs would not "bail out".

> Even though I do try to do a lot of projects that are visual, so many ELLs truly struggle with tests, and I'm sure it's because they aren't sure what the words are. And, for me it's all right if you want to use a dictionary, but you know very few of them do—maybe 10%. I've tried to structure grades so that they don't totally bail out.

One staff member indicated that the passing rate is about the same for ELL and non-ELL students, but that high grades ("A's" and "B's") are rarer for ELL students. Other interviewees stated that the ability to pass classes depends on the efforts of the individual students, regardless of language status. Some teachers answered this question with a qualification, such as "The passing rates are about the same, but…" or "The passing rates are about the same because…" One course identified by several staff members as exceptionally difficult for ELLs was Integrated Physics and Chemistry:

> The ELL pass rate is lower, especially in I.P.C. (Integrated Physics and Chemistry). Did the kids talk to you about I.P.C.? 80% failure rate; I'd rather see them just take Physics.

Credits and Grade Level Status

The second interview question in the set concerning ongoing progress toward goals was, "Does being over age in a particular grade or in a particular course pose problems for ELL students or their teachers?" Resoundingly, staff members expressed that over age was a significant problem for students and many times for staff:

> It poses problems for everybody. When you're overage, you are wanting. You're working at this particular level, and you're working to support families. Maybe you are out on your own. You have a conflict between work and school--not only long hours but being constantly tired.

According to staff members, over age students are often unable to participate in extra-curricular (UIL) activities primarily because they work more outside of school, and have less time, energy, and motivation for studies. Staff members also indicated that older students are more likely to have children of their own or to assume additional family responsibilities. Some teachers expressed that older students tend to sometimes withdraw socially, masking deficiencies such as lack of academic preparedness by misbehaving in class or not participating at all:

> One of the biggest things I noticed is that many of the boys work at night, and they want to sleep during the day. Students who are older may have a deficit of skills, and--instead of revealing that--they choose to misbehave to redirect attention.

The most severe problem that staff members associated with students being over age was the tendency to leave school prior to completion—either by dropping out, transferring to another school or another program, or just simply not attending. Another issue interviewees mentioned was the tendency of teachers to base academic expectation on perceived age and maturity.

Several staff members mentioned that "aging out" (reaching age 21) creates pressure and problems for those students or for their teachers. One teacher indicated that attitudes shift when students approach age twenty-one by considering themselves adults who no longer belong in the high school setting. Some issues raised by staff members related to student over age included

inappropriate academic expectations, sexually mature behavior, and pressure to graduate.

> I think it poses problems for some of the "kiddos", particularly if they're nineteen or twenty years old and still taking Geography. In US History or Government, it's not really that noticeable that they're over age. It only poses problems in the expectations. I think it's frustrating for me as a teacher to be looking at a young lady who's turning twenty-one, and hasn't passed TAKS only because of language. She's getting all this pressure, and it's just making it harder and harder for her.

Graduation and Post-Secondary Education

The final question in this interview section was a two-part query: "In your opinion, do most ELL students view graduation and post-secondary schooling as goals they will accomplish?" After reviewing the responses of the staff members, it appears that posing so complex a question may have elicited less information than asking two discreet questions. Some staff members tended to combine their perspectives on these two issues into a single "yes" or "no" answer.

Staff responses were divided as to whether students viewed graduation and post-secondary school as attainable goals. One teacher drew a distinction between what ELL students wish to accomplish, and what students think they realistically can accomplish. Several respondents stated that ELL students did not know--or did not pursue--the process needed to achieve these things:

> I think that many of them see these as goals they wish to accomplish. But--depending on their tenacity or their outlook--they feel these goals are virtually unattainable. They're not indifferent to the importance of their education. The ones that are—they could be speaking any language—that's generally not a language issue.

Several of the staff members referenced their own anecdotal evidence of students who opted for the job market instead of pursuing college, or who expressed interest in college, but did not initiate or follow through with the processes to attend. Still others expressed doubt that the high school programs were adequately preparing ELL students for college success:

> Sadly to say, most don't plan college. Many of them come with the idea of coming to this country to make a living—to help their parents. I am talking about the basic necessities. If we had a lot more information out there to parents more often, many of them would be looking forward to it, and saying, "Sure, I'm going to graduate and I'm going to college." But when it comes down to "Did you fill out the resume? Did you do this?" I know of kids who have not filled out certain applications, and have not taken certain tests yet; they're in limbo.

Staff Responses to the Final Interview Questions

Variation in ELL Success

Two additional questions were posited to respondents to give respondents to provide opportunities for additional commentary. By asking, "How do you explain the wide variation in success of ELL students?", the researcher was attempting to identify just what variables are most critical to or most responsible for ELL student success. Overwhelmingly, staff members supported the notion that there is a wide variation in the success rate of ELL students. Some contributing factors noted were amount of prior schooling, literacy, home and family responsibilities, teacher support, early academic success, and individual motivation. The most frequently mentioned factor was personal effort:

> Some of them are so driven—just self-driven—always wanting to know, "Why did I give this grade?" I really think a lot of it has to do with the teacher and the teacher's encouragement.

Some respondents suggested that external factors often resulted in a lack of linguistic, academic, and even emotional preparedness for some ELL students. One staff member alluded to the necessity of fulfilling basic necessities before students could progress to higher order needs:

> We have so many ways to gauge success. Just to have them go through a whole semester and they come in and say, "Good morning"--I think is success. Many of them have to work to support their families and themselves when they come into the country. They are living with friends, with family, with uncles they have never seen before, but have heard about or talked to on the phone. Based on Maslow's hierarchy theory, you do have to eat--and meet the basic necessities--before you actually think about passing a test or going on to college.

Additional Information Staff Members Wished to Offer

The final interview question, "Is there anything you would like to add?" elicited responses from only some participants, indicating that the questionnaire may have been a complete and purposeful instrument. Some respondents chose to reiterate themes addressed in earlier questions. Most original commentary involved concerns for the future:

> I've been trying since the beginning of the year to get an administrator to really sit down with us and hammer down with us a curriculum for ESOL. After we went through all that planning for the ELLs, basically none of it is going to be included in the high school redesign. I am not sure how that is going to affect our kids' needs. I think that many of them are going to be shutting down if anything else.

According to many ESOL staff interviewed, inclusion and mainstreaming of the ELL students early on is a bad idea or a risky one, while many teachers and other staff members outside of the ESOL department support early mainstreaming. Commentary from ESOL teachers concerned specific issues such as class dynamics:

> Commentary from a non-ESOL teacher:
>
> The thing I'd add is that we've improved it greatly, and I think that inclusion is going to help. Inclusion's going to be a real plus for our "kiddos"; I just hope we get the resources and the backing to do it. I think the faculty here feels so isolated and so disconnected from the ESL program. Teachers in the program make an assumption that we don't care about "their kids".
>
> Commentary from an ESOL teacher:
>
> I think Inclusion has the potential to be terrible. If you're asking two teachers to team, those teachers need to have common planning, common purpose, and equality. If you're asking one teacher to team teach with three other teachers, then she's just an assistant, she will not have her desk in that room, she will not have her name on the attendance, and it will not be on the report card. She will be a paraprofessional, and will be treated like one. And, if you match teachers based on scheduling, rather than based on teaching strengths, how successful can it be?

CHAPTER VII:

SYNTHESIS OF THE STUDENT AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES

Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the primary differences in the survey and interview groups. Next, I compare the overall (combined survey and interview) responses of ELL students with the overall (combined survey and interview) responses of staff members. I then identify which perspectives are shared, and which perspectives are exclusive to each group. Finally, I organize the student and staff perspectives in such a way to illustrate their relationship with the Lived Reality Model. These are shown in Diagram II: Shared and Exclusive Realities.

Differences in the Survey and Interview Groups

Student responses to the interview questions echo the views and sentiments expressed in the student surveys. Of the forty ELL students who completed the surveys, seventeen of those students (85%) were among the twenty ELL students completing the interviews. Therefore, the interview responses—for the most part-- expand or explain themes expressed by the survey group. The staff survey and interview respondent ratios reflect almost the same ratios as the student groups; of the twenty staff members who completed the surveys, eight of those staff members were among the ten who completed the interviews. One notable difference in the composition of the staff survey sample and the staff interview samples was the experience and expertise of the group members. The

interview group consisted of committed school leaders that included department heads and administrators—educators with longitudinal perspectives and great passion, while the survey group was comprised of these individuals in addition to relatively new or inexperienced staff members. Since all staff members who participated were volunteers, all participants exercised genuine interest in the welfare of ELL students on this campus. However, because of differences in experience level and leadership status, responses from the interview group could reflect a greater knowledge base than responses from the survey group.

The student interview responses included in the interviewee commentary are noticeably shorter than the staff responses. Students did not fail to answer questions, but many of the responses they offered were simple affirmations, brief statements of support, or concise suggestions. One of the reasons for this comparative brevity might have been that most ELL students interviewed had entered Central High School as non-English speakers, and are still developing their English proficiency. Also, students knew that the researcher was more comfortable conducting interviews in English, and they were very considerate in clearly conveying their opinions simply. Furthermore, qualitative research studies done with students and adults generally reflect a same tendency for adult respondents to offer lengthier testimonials. However, what many students did not supply in quantity, they did provide with detail and with "heart".

Quality of Instructional Programs

There is a common, "shared reality" regarding quality of instructional programs for English Language Learners at Central High School; it entails several factors that include dedicated, effective teachers and "buy-in" or support of most ELL students. Both students and staff members praise the Newcomer program for its strong teachers and thoughtful design. Students and staff members agree that some unmodified coursework apart from ESOL is difficult for ELL students early on, but--apart from certain text-intensive courses--becomes much more manageable once students develop functional English, supportive relationships, and greater savvy as to how school systems work and relate to academic success. Students and staff further agree that teachers often do not have enough adequate teaching materials to instruct ELLs without great improvisation and searching for resources. The students and staff also concur that positive teacher attitude and style are instrumental to student success, and these attributes vary considerably among teachers.

Despite several areas of consensus regarding quality of instructional programs for ELLs, there are some "exclusive realities" reflected in the student and staff responses. ELL students were more complimentary of the instructional programs at Central High School than staff members were. While staff members referenced improvement, good intentions, and strengths in some instructional areas, students overwhelmingly endorsed the quality of education at Central High School, stressed the conscientiousness and caring displayed by their teachers, and

specifically noted which teachers had done an exemplary job of teaching and supporting them. Many students recounted a number of teachers who take shown special interest in them, tutoring them after hours, mentoring them through personal trials, and supporting them during and after enrollment in their classes. Several students referred to specific teachers as "good teachers", and recalled some relationships with instructors that had endured through high school.

However, many students voiced very specific ideas for instructional improvement such as providing additional textbooks and reference books in classrooms and utilizing group work and peer instruction more frequently. Overwhelmingly, ELL students endorsed group work as a favored instructional strategy. Students were quite specific in their recommendations that teachers utilize the sheltered English techniques of illustration, demonstration, giving examples, using charts, and providing other visuals to reinforce the concepts they are teaching. Staff members spoke more of constraints such as class sizes and scheduling than of actual teaching techniques; one reason for this may have been that professional staff personnel are aware of many issues such as staffing, budget constraints, and school organization dynamics that students may not consider.

Student opinions were divided on the practice of using Spanish in classrooms to instruct or to assist students, but they did endorse such first language support in some instances. Some students stated that some assistance in Spanish is very beneficial, but others expressed that too much reliance on Spanish in instruction actually delays students' progression in English. Student experience

level in high school seemed to be a delineating factor among respondents; more experienced students argued for greater emphasis on English, while Newcomer students contended that use of Spanish in instruction was a support they could not afford to relinquish. Staff opinions were divided as to the prudence of using Spanish in classrooms to instruct or to assist students, but most staff members worried that the use of Spanish translation is more of a hindrance than a benefit for Spanish-speaking ELLs and for ELLs whose first language is not Spanish. According to many staff members, Spanish-speaking ELLs tend to rely on Spanish-speaking teachers' efforts and empathy, and consequently struggle less to acquire the English they need for communication and academic success.

Staff members voiced certain concerns regarding instructional programs that students did not mention. Overall, staff members alluded to strong leadership within the ESOL department, concluding that there is ample instructional support for students at the beginner (Newcomer) level in English classes, but that support wanes as ELL students continue to progress through school. Interviewees further agreed that content area support for upper level English, Science and other subjects is generally inadequate. Overwhelmingly, staff respondents indicated that teachers care deeply, but added that constraints such as student learning gaps, large class sizes, low reading levels, and heightened performance expectations work to diminish the time and ability of teachers to accomplish goals with many ELL students.

While students were generally "upbeat" in giving their responses, staff members were very emotional in their statements of concern; some teachers expressed sympathy and sadness regarding hardships that students they know have endured due to personal circumstances or due to the inability of the school to assist, educate and guide them sufficiently.

Several teachers alluded to the difficulty in individualizing to meet diverse language needs of ELLs in heterogeneous class settings, and several teachers also asserted that students are sometimes placed in coursework inappropriately—by age rather than by knowledge and competencies. Students did not mention the lack of individualization in class, perhaps because they were unaware that teachers were struggling with that issue; nor did students mention inappropriate course placement, apart from a few specific courses. Some staff members referenced that certain structures such as collaboration for in lesson planning are now in place, but not always in practice school-wide. Several staff members expressed the concern that students are not always adequately scaffolded from prior or preliminary learning to grade-level expectations, and that ultimately they may be unprepared for experiences such as Exit TAKS Exams, senior course work, and college. Students did not mention specific learning gaps or deficiencies except for English language proficiency, nor did they mention reduced support for advanced ELL students as a problem.

Staff respondents were divided on their degree of optimism for the instructional inclusion model to be introduced for the 2006-2007 school year, as

were students. But, staff interviewees indicated a greater knowledge of impending changes than student commentary reflected. Most staff members outside the ESOL department viewed the proposed mainstreaming in academics as a "plus" for ELLs, explaining that too much support enables rather than empowers ELL students. Most teachers inside the ESOL department expressed serious reservations about the changes, suggesting that the plan for mainstreaming ELL students would not utilize ESOL staff efficiently, nor support ELL students in direct ways. Only two students reported that there were rumors of changes for the coming school year, and these two students expressed differing viewpoints.

School Connectedness

ELL students and staff members do perceive a "shared reality" regarding many aspects of school connectedness. They agree that Central High School offers a positive, friendly and supportive school environment for ELL students overall. They further concur that Newcomer students experience a stressful adjustment period when first entering the school environment, but that this improves as students learn how school systems operate and as they develop networks for peer support. Students and staff members agree that in some ways school connectedness is more easily achieved by Spanish speaking students than by students who speak unique language. A third area of agreement is that early success in English and other academics is critical to subsequent success. Both groups also concur that the physical isolation of ELL students (such as through

class location in portable buildings) results in poor communication and creates unintended segregation.

ELL students perceive an "exclusive reality" regarding some aspects of school connectedness. Most ELL students indicated that they are connected with the school in a number of important ways, but disconnected in other ways. Most students expressed that the Central High School environment is warm and friendly, and that they enjoy being there. They allude to "an absence of problems", "feeling safe", and wanting to come to school. Although some students indicated that teacher attitude toward assisting students varies greatly, students agreed for the most part that extra assistance such as tutoring is available if students seek it. The main problems that student mentioned in accessing special assistance such as tutoring are receiving the information about such services, and having tutors available who can communicate with students in their first language. ELL students and staff members agree that ELL students support one another very well, and socialize with one another often. While staff members alluded to a hesitancy of ELL students to interact or socialize with other cultures or with other diverse student groups, the student interviewees did not reference this tendency; in contrast many students suggested that harmony among diverse student groups and among individuals was a powerful and enjoyable aspect of the Central High School environment.

Staff interviewees suggested that ELL students are only marginally "connected" as indicated by their propensity to act as their own agents in seeking

and obtaining academic assistance, and further noted that ELL students are more likely to seek assistance from ESOL teachers, bilingual teachers, or teachers that displayed certain attributes such as empathy or patience. Several staff members recounted many instances in which they had extended special interest and effort to certain ELL students, and that those students did experience greater academic success. Many teachers expressed that teacher-student bonds were instrumental in what many ELL students accomplished, and suggested that while student effort is probably the greatest determiner of student success, teacher efforts with individual students can be an equally important factor.

The "shared reality" of parent participation at Central High School is that too little active participation exists for ELL parents. Both groups (ELL students and staff members) reported that ELL parents are not visibly active in many aspects of the school process. They agree upon several reasons for this—work commitments for parents and guardians, necessity to care for younger children, lack of parents' English skills, and insufficient two-way communication. Both students and staff members suggest that the school could make stronger efforts to elicit ELL parent support, and both groups recommended more frequent communication with parents in Spanish, more personal types of communications, and more thorough communication overall. Students and staff members also agree that the manner in which ELL parents are treated is critical to parent involvement, and that ELL parents respond better to invitations than to announcements.

ELL students and staff members expressed "exclusive realities" regarding parent involvement as well. While parent involvement represents a huge area of concern for students, the majority of the ELL students expressed that their parents do care about their learning, their accomplishments, and their academic futures. They further suggested that their parents would participate more overtly if the school put certain communication systems in place, and if the school was more creative in providing opportunities for involvement. Some students envisioned expanded school activities such as camps, student/parent nights, and on-site English lessons.

The "exclusive reality" that staff members expressed regarding parent participation was that ELL parents may care, but that they do not express it in active ways that support academics. Several staff members indicated that parent participation is low for the general student population as well, and one teacher even termed parent involvement as "non-existent". However, several teachers also indicated that when they initiate personal contact with parents of ELL students, the results for students are tremendous, and include improved student attendance, reduced behavior problems, and more frequent completion of class and homework assignments. The majority of staff members interviewed suggested that the school could be a much better job of communicating with ELL parents—in correspondence and in meetings, and should offer more invitations and incentives for parent attendance. Whereas staff members stressed language

and economics as primary reasons barriers to ELL parent participation, students reported lack of information as the worst obstacle.

The "shared reality" of extra-curricular involvement for ELL students is that it is not high. Students and staff members agree on many causes for this which include lack of information, family responsibilities, employment obligations, and UIL age restrictions and eligibility requirements that prohibit participation for many ELL students. Students and staff also agree that many out-of-class opportunities are available for students—including academic tutoring, sports, and clubs, but that ELL students are not represented in very few of these activities except Soccer and the International Club. Both students and staff members mention fear or apprehension as a reason that some ELLs choose not to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Though many views regarding extra-curricular participation for ELLs are shared among staff and students, there are some "exclusive realities" for both groups. Almost all of the student interviewees indicated that they had participated in extra-curricular activities at some time during high school, and they expressed pride in those accomplishments. Many interviewees recounted having fun, gaining confidence, and even winning championships. Several ELL students stated that the UIL age limitation forced them to discontinue extra-curricular participation. A minority of students indicated that they currently participate in after school activities such as clubs or sports, but most also stated that they would like to participate if they had the opportunity to do so. Students expressed that the

greatest impediments to extra-curricular involvement are school-related factors such as lack of information and lack of language support. References to information and communication emerged many times during the student interviews. Thus, extra-curricular participation for ELL students appears to relate more to access than to availability or economics.

Regarding extracurricular activities, the "exclusive reality" expressed by most staff members included the notion that most ELL students did not participate in extra-curricular activities, not had they ever participated. Participation, from the viewpoint of many staff members, seems to relate more to student-based or economic factors than to school-related influences. Though many of the barriers that staff members referenced were the identical barriers identified by students themselves, they were not listed in the same order of importance. For instance, while staff interviewees cited employment and family responsibilities as key reasons students do not participate, students expressed that lack of communication is most critical. Many staff members suggested that there is a link between the individual effort of the staff members to recruit and encourage students and the participation of ELL students, and some staff members also suggested that lack of previous experience in a certain activities, such as sports, may play a part in some student' hesitation to participate.

Self-Image and Self-Efficacy

Commentary from ELL students and staff members did not suggest a "shared reality" of how the ELL students view themselves--apart from the observation that happiness, social comfort, and academic success for most ELL students improve with time and experience. According to many staff members, ELL students have a difficult time being happy in school because of multiple obstacles that hamper their success and lower their self esteem, and staff members collectively expressed that Newcomer students often flounder in an academic environment and school structure that they often cannot understand--much less flourish in.

According to the ELL students, however, they are almost all quite happy, as are their friends and fellow ELLs. Most students contended that they have many friends, and spoke of "feeling good" about school, looking forward to coming to school each day, and enjoying the harmony among students. While most reported an initial period of adjustment and struggle, none stated that they found this experience impossible or defeating; in fact, many students referred to their initial period in a school as a challenge, and they expressed pride in their growth and progress.

There was also a difference in how the two groups defined "happiness". While most staff members implied that happiness should somehow entail success, students conveyed a simpler view of happiness—often as simple as the absence of problems. Staff members were divided on the perceived happiness of ELL

students, but many indicated that Spanish speaking students were probably happier than students with less common first languages, as they had greater opportunities to communicate, and more friends to associate with. One teacher suggested that happiness may actually be a "delusion" for some ELL students because happiness alone will not ensure their productivity or success. Some staff members mentioned positive and negative effects that teacher attitude and effort appeared to have on ELLs student self-image and self-efficacy. Several staff members mentioned a tendency for Newcomer students to be shy in certain situations or with certain types of students; student commentary did not reflect this perspective.

Responses did not indicate a "shared reality" of how ELL students view themselves as scholars. While most students asserted that they considered themselves to be capable scholars who frequently took initiatives such as seeking individualized help or tutoring, many staff members contended that most ELL students rarely take advantage of special academic opportunities such as tutoring. While staff interviewees attributed a lack of student presence mostly to economic or family issues, most students cited lack of information or absence of Spanish speaking teachers as primary reasons that they do not attend tutoring sessions. While many staff members assumed that students could not attend these sessions, many students stated that they chose not to attend them.

Terms such as "overwhelmed", "frustrated", "isolated", "hesitant", and "lacking confidence" were abundant in the staff concerns regarding the school

experience for Newcomer students. Most ELL students interviewed stated that do expect to pass their classes, although many students also mentioned having difficulty in B.C.I.S. (Business Communications Information Systems), I.P.C., (Integrated Physics and Chemistry) and certain other courses. Some students stated that either B.C.I.S. or I.P.C. stood between them and graduation. According to many of ELL students, though several barriers exist for ELL students, none of these barriers prevent success if students exert effort and make the right choices. Those students who do not choose to care often "skip" school, neglect their studies, and ultimately fail. Several students noted that they know other ELL students who miss school continually.

Ongoing Progress toward Academic and Related Goals

Regarding ongoing progress toward academic and related goals, there is a "shared reality" among ELL students and staff members that effort leads to accomplishment. Overall, students and staff members agree that most ELL students who work diligently will succeed in passing the majority of their classes; students and staff members also agreed that certain courses pose major challenges, especially for Newcomer ELLs. Most teachers expressed that ELL students' chances of passing their courses are about the same or only slightly lower than those of English fluent students.

Students and staff members expressed "exclusive realities" regarding what acceptable class performance is; students seem to consider "Passing" as the

standard they were satisfied with, while teachers differentiate between barely passing and "A", "B" status. Another difference between students and staff members on the issue of academic progress was that staff members were keenly aware of TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) performance of ELL students, while students (apart for graduating seniors and those approaching graduation) did not mention TAKS as a significant problem.

There is not a "shared reality" regarding the significance of being over age in grade. According to most staff members, being over age in grade poses serious problems in freshman classes where fourteen year olds must routinely interact with eighteen and nineteen year olds, and also presents problems that include misbehavior related to learning deficits and diminished energy and interest in school. Students contended that being over age was not a problem for them personally nor was it for their friends, apart from its interference with extra-curricular participation. The notion some staff interviewees expressed that over age students behave in certain ways was not reflected in dialogue with students. (However, staff members are privy to a more longitudinal view of overall students' performance over time, and consider cumulative progress year to year.)

There is no "shared reality" regarding ELL students' graduation expectations, nor their college intentions. Students overwhelmingly expressed that they do expect to graduate, and that they planned to attend college. Almost all ELL students indicated that they will graduate; however, some students stated that their graduation is contingent upon passing TAKS Examinations or particular

courses such as B.C.I.S. Regarding post-graduation plans and other career and life plans, almost all students expressed that--after graduating high school-- they would like to advance to college or career training. Many students conveyed clear visions of future careers or accomplishments they wished to attain including Police Officer, Teacher, Computer Scientist, Psychologist, and Marine Biologist. Some ELL students stated, however, that they were not always sure who to consult for academic planning or college information; many students did not know who their counselor was.

Many staff members asserted that ELL students do not envision high school completion and graduation as goals they will accomplish, though staff members also suggested that most ELL students are capable of attaining both these goals. Several staff interviewees alluded to specific examples of former ELL students who are currently experiencing college success, and one staff member asserted that the valedictorian of the previous year's graduating class had been an ELL Newcomer at one time. Many staff members suggested that a great number of ELL students will immediately enter the work force after high school because they have connections or in-roads with friends or relatives employed in certain enterprises. Other staff members expressed the concern that often many ELL students are exiting high school ill-prepared for college, and may actually be predisposed to academic failure at that academic level.

One perspective that ELL students and staff do share is that—for most ELL students--post-secondary education is basically unplanned.

Perspectives Applied to the Lived Reality Model

ELL students and staff members share a great number of perspectives and maintain several exclusive perspectives as well. The Shared and Exclusive Realities for students and staff discussed in this chapter are synthesized and represented in Figure 2: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Perspectives Applied to the Lived Reality Model which appears on page 184. For efficiency, the model is printed in landscaped format. It is not possible to include all of the themes expressed by the students and staff members within the model; therefore, the most predominant themes are represented.

The following perspectives are major themes contained in the "Shared Perspectives" set:

Quality of Instructional Programs:

- Central High School has dedicated, caring teachers.
- More teaching materials are needed for ELLs.
- The Newcomer Program is strong.

School Connectedness:

- Extra academic assistance is available.
- ELL parents are not visible at school.
- Extra-curricular involvement is low; UIL age restrictions are problematic.

Self-Image and Self-Efficacy:

- Spanish-speaking ELL students have much support.
- Confidence grows over time and with English acquisition.
- Central High School offers a warm, friendly atmosphere.

Ongoing Progress Toward Academic and Related Goals:

- Effort leads to accomplishment.
- B.C.I.S. and I.P.C. are very difficult for ELLs.
- Credit accrual is a problem for ELLs.
- TAKS is a barrier to graduation.
- Many ELL students do not have solid college plans.

These are among the major themes expressed in the perspectives set exclusive to ELL students:

Quality of Instructional Programs:

- Use of Spanish in class aids ELL students at first, but hinders students later.
- Instructional programs are working fairly well.
- ESOL techniques such as illustration and interactive group work best for ELLs.

School Connectedness:

- ELLs do not access tutoring because of lack of information or poor communication.
- Parents care and are involved directly (with students, though not at school); the school should be more creative in enlisting parents.
- ELLs want to participate in extra-curricular activities, but do not primarily because of lack of communication.

Self-Image and Self-Efficacy:

- ELLs are happy in school; happiness relates to an absence of problems.
- ELLs are comfortable in school participation, and are confident as scholars.

Ongoing Progress Toward Academic and Related Goals:

- Most ELLs expect to pass their classes.
- Over age is not a problem for most ELLs.

- Most ELLs have goals that include graduation and college, but need information and assistance to attain these goals.

These are among the major themes in the perspectives set exclusive to staff members:

Quality of Instructional Programs:

- Use of Spanish in classrooms is more of a hindrance than a help to ELLs.
- Reading deficits and learning gaps are serious problems for many ELLs.
- There is not enough time for teachers to individualize for ELLs.

School Connectedness:

- ELLs do not access tutoring because of employment and because of home-related issues.
- Parents disassociate with the school because of language issues, literacy, work, children, and economic issues such as transportation problems.
- ELLs do not participate in extra-curricular activities because of work demands and home responsibilities such as care of siblings.

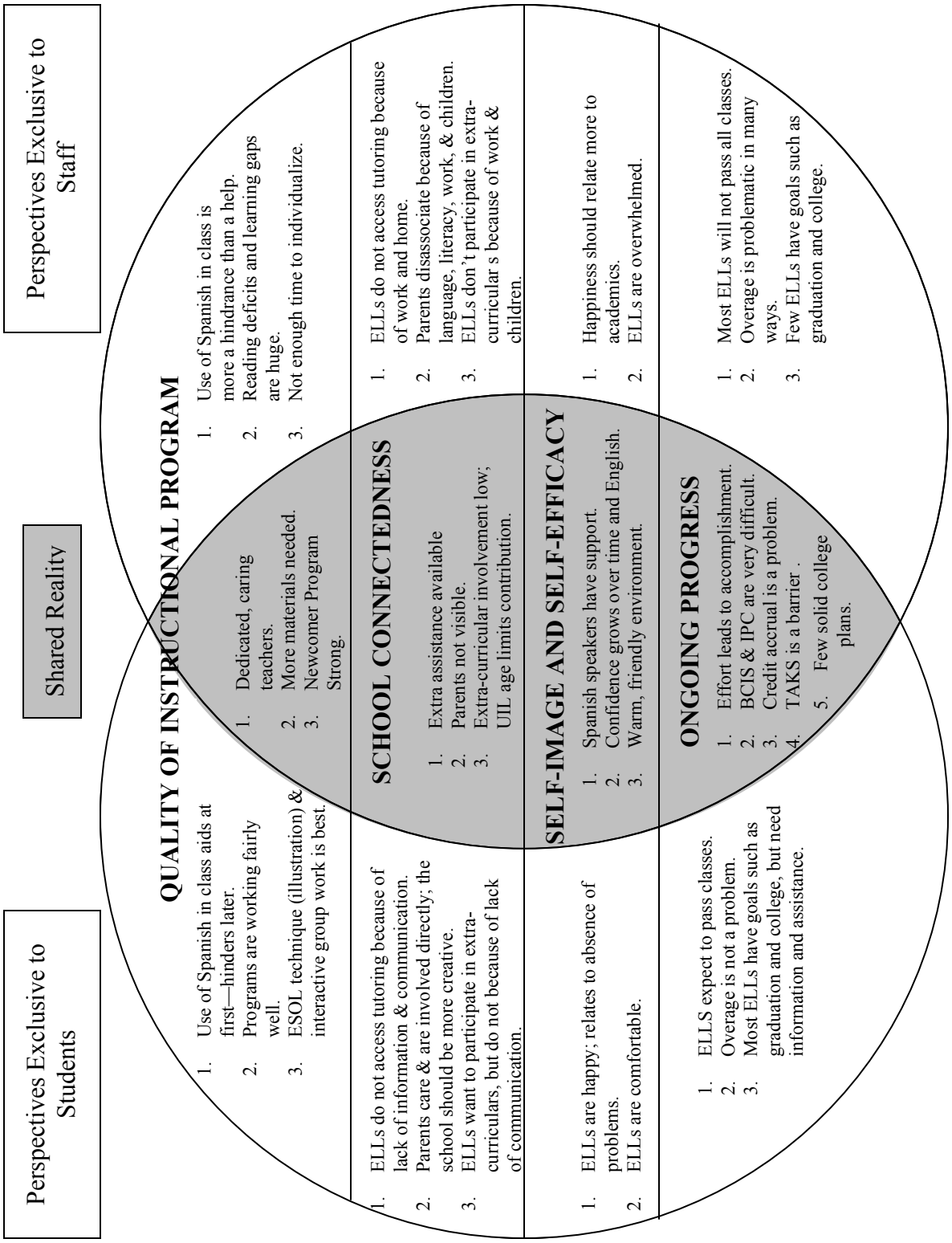
Self-Image and Self-Efficacy:

- Happiness should relate more to academics for ELLs.
- ELLs (particularly Newcomers) are overwhelmed by the school experience.

Ongoing Progress Toward Academic and Related Goals:

- Most ELLs will not pass all of their classes.
- Over age is problematic for ELL students in many ways.
- Few ELLs have goals such as graduation and college.

Figure 2: Perspectives Applied to the Lived Reality Model



CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

In this chapter, I review the problem that inspired this research study. I then revisit the research theory and the purpose of the study. I briefly review the methodology used in the research. Next, I discuss the findings of this study, and offer recommendations for policies, programs, and practices based on the information gathered during the dissertation process. I conclude the chapter with suggestions for further research.

Review of the Research Problem(s)

Overall, school efforts to adequately educate English Language Learners have fallen short. With a rapidly growing English Language Learner population in US schools, and with increased expectations for students to succeed at high academic levels, schools are seeking immediate solutions to lingering problems such as low standardized achievement scores and unacceptable graduation rates for ELLs. To exacerbate the crisis, the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 stipulates that all school must make incremental gains or reach prescribed achievement levels for all student groups each year--or suffer sanctions that can threaten their existence. ELLs--as a student population--have struggled to meet prescribed gains. At the student level, promotion and retention, graduation, and college opportunities hinge on standardized test performance.

Campuses that serve ELL students face several serious and well-documented challenges. Among these are challenges related to socio-economics, and challenges involving instructional programs, school connectedness, self-image and self-esteem, and attainment of academic and related achievement goals. Neither ELL students nor their parents are always given equitable opportunities to participate comfortably and fully in school, nor do they always access the opportunities that schools provide. The barriers to academic success that ELLs face, the growing ELL enrollment in US schools, and the national move toward increased academic rigor represent three powerful forces that, together, create a critical situation for schools.

Student achievement data confirm that, holistically, the majority of Central High School's English Language Learners achieve well below their English-fluent peers in a number of critical academic areas, especially during their first years of enrollment. English Language Learners experience an array of academic challenges. Among the chief challenges for ELLs addressed in this dissertation are:

- Poor TAKS performance,
- High failure rate in coursework, and high retention rate in grade,
- Depressed graduation rates and high "Continued High School" statistics,
- Excessive absences and limited opportunities to recapture credits,
- Reading deficits and low literacy,
- Learning gaps and incongruent knowledge/experiences,
- Economic constraints such as the necessity to work outside the school day,

- Parent barriers such as language differences, economic constraints and insufficient communication from the school
- Inadequate course offerings and inappropriate placement,
- Inequities in standardized testing,
- Arbitrary withdrawal,
- Limited instructional accommodations for ELL students, and
- Limited communication regarding academics and extra-curricular opportunities.

Many English Language Learners share a similar background, equivalent socio-economic status, like language challenges, and even a common culture. Some ELL students attend class sporadically, and experience only fragmented learning, while others have model attendance and proceed systematically toward their academic and life goals. Certain ELL students develop English easily and become active members in high school life, while others acquire English slowly and make minimal gains toward graduation. A number of Central High English Language Learners consistently defy multiple barriers, and achieve at levels commensurate with their native English counterparts. However, many do not.

A disproportionate number of ELL students fail classes or are retained in grade. An ongoing academic debate concerns the possible benefits or harmful effects of retention in grade and the benefits and drawbacks of the inverse policy, social promotion. Overwhelmingly, the research literature supports the view that retention in grade has little benefit, and can actually harm students in their development of positive self-identity, and in their probability of future academic

and life success. Research strongly links over age to school dropout, and further links drop out to societal problems such as joblessness and crime.

The Austin Independent School District and Central High School campus have implemented several initiatives that have met with variable success for English Language Learners. The chief initiatives addressed in this study include:

- The Study Skills class,
- Custom classes: ESOL Biology and ESOL Algebra I
- SIOP (Sheltered Instruction) training for staff,
- Increased ESOL staffing,
- Creation of the International Welcome Center,
- Creation of the International High School,
- Tuition-free summer school and TAKS classes for ELLs, and
- Inclusion (mainstreaming) for 2006-2007

All students deserve equal or equitable educational inputs--and outcomes. Despite several research-based or broadly supported initiatives, ELLs are still not experiencing the success of their English fluent peers.

Review of the Research Theory and Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived reality of English Language Learners in an urban high school by comparing the perceptions of ELL students with those of staff members who work with them toward four dimensions of schooling that contribute to overall school success. From the findings of this

study, Central High School leaders and staff may gain information and insight to enhance the lived experience and the overall success of ELL students.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of English Language Learners regarding their experiences in this high school?
2. What are the perceptions of staff members regarding ELLs and regarding the school's responses to their needs?
3. What is the congruence or incongruence between the ELL students' views of school and self, and the perceptions of staff?
4. What, if any, are the implications for organizational action or change to ensure greater overall success of this student group?

The first two research questions are answered in Chapters V and VI through exploring and summarizing the responses of the ELL students and staff members. Student and staff views are summarized by theme and illustrated by direct commentary from members of both groups. The third research question was addressed in Chapter VII in the comparison of the two perspective sets. The final research question regarding implications for organizational action or change is addressed in the Recommendations portion of this chapter.

Review of the Methodology

This study includes quantitative data obtained from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System Campus Information Pages and qualitative data obtained through surveys, interviews, and review of relevant school documents. The quantitative data was included to aid in establishing the context of the study. The qualitative portion of the study consists of surveys and interviews with ELL students and staff members to elicit their respective views regarding critical aspects of the four dimensions of the ELL school experience that this study addresses. Surveys were first conducted with ELL student and staff volunteers to broaden the over-all study participation, and to prompt respondents to ponder perspectives that would be explored more deeply in the interviews. The interview protocols paralleled the surveys in content, and were utilized to gather more detailed information as to why ELL students engage, participate, and achieve as they do.

The survey and interview instruments were designed to "get at" the four factors or dimensions that this research study concerns, and to explore three critical aspects of each. In total, the survey items consist of twenty-four statements of agreement or non-agreement. These were rated using the Likert scale assigning values of from "1" to "6", with "5" and "6" signifying strongest agreement, "3" and "4" indicating neutral or moderate agreement, and "1" or "2" representing lowest agreement. Interview questions addressed the same research areas as the surveys, but were written to elicit more detailed information. The

student survey and interview protocols were available in Spanish and English, but the staff versions were only in English.

The student survey and interview sample groups represented a cross-section of the English Language Learners at Central High School that included first, second and third-year ESOL students, and students still classified as ELL who had completed ESOL coursework, as well as both genders. Ultimately, forty students completed the survey and twenty students participating in one-on-one interviews. A large majority of the survey participants (approximately 80%) chose the Spanish versions of the survey instruments, and most interviewees also interviewed in Spanish. Twenty staff members completed the survey, and ten staff members participated in the individual interviews.

The responses are expressed in Table VII (p. 114) as percentages of students and staff members who express differing agreement levels with survey statements. Interview responses were analyzed by themes found in the research literature, relevant school documents, and student performance data or extracted from careful review of the interview tapes. Specific student and staff commentary supporting predominant themes was transferred to a data file for inclusion in the dissertation. All physical tapes and response documents were labeled and stored.

A final step in analyzing the research findings was comparing the survey and interview responses of ELL students with the responses of staff members. The commonalities among or differences between perspectives were then synthesized as they relate to the research model, and appear in Figure 2:

Perspectives Applied to the Lived Reality Model, p. 184). Campus and district documents and data served to triangulate the research.

Research Findings and Recommendations

Many factors contribute to a successful academic experience for English Language Learners. According to the information gathered through this research, Central High School ELL students clearly love and enjoy their school, and Central High School staff members truly love and want to support the English Language Learners on this campus. ELL students and staff members agree on several campus strengths and weaknesses in programs and practices that serve these students. These strengths and weaknesses are supported by student achievement data, and reflect trends enduring over time. Central High School decision makers should celebrate and retain those strengths that ELL students and staff members identify as their "Shared Reality" and immediately begin to address weaknesses that both groups perceive. Regarding "Exclusive Realities", it is the responsibility of the Central High School leadership and staff to communicate, consider, and commit to exploring these differences in perspectives. Meeting the challenge to serve English Language Learners may mean moving beyond the needs of the dominant cultural group and recognizing the power of diversity.

The final research question is answered through the following recommendations for policy, programs, and practices. Some recommendations from this research involve policies at the district level, others concern campus

initiatives and programs, and still others address improvements in practice and pedagogy in the classroom. Recommendations for change are grouped into the four discreet dimensions addressed in this study: quality of instructional program, school connectedness, student self-image and self-efficacy, and ongoing progress toward academic and related goals. For efficiency, these are listed below:

Recommendations for Improving Instructional Programs for ELLs:

1. First year ELL students and students in very difficult courses such as B.C.I.S. and I.P.C. need much support; an integrated approach of Bilingual Education and ESOL could benefit first year ELL students and students enrolled in very difficult courses such as IPC.
2. Sheltered English instruction and ESOL techniques (SIOP) should be required training for every teacher in high population ELL schools.
3. Truly qualified staff members should be recruited and retained through employment incentives. Schools should create bilingual work staffs, not just bilingual teaching staffs to facilitate communication with ELL students and parents.
4. Budgets should be adjusted to ensure that ELL students are provided comparable and effective materials for instruction and learning in all subject areas. If the district cannot provide these funds, other funding sources should be sought.
5. Cross-disciplinary meetings should be held routinely for departments to communicate with one another, to share resources, and to plan together.
6. ELL students should be assessed in each subject area to determine prior learning, and then be placed at their appropriate instructional levels rather than at arbitrary grade levels.

7. The four year graduation plan for ELL students is not realistic. There should be a five year plan for some ELL students—with the fifth year including coursework in the students' areas of interest.
8. The TAKS Exit requirements for Newcomer students should be evaluated, and alternative authentic assessments (such as Spanish TAKS) considered.
9. The International High School should continue and expand.
10. Class sizes should be reduced for Newcomer students, and reduced school-wide, if possible. Teachers want to individualize and meet all students' needs; with current student: teacher ratios, they cannot.

Recommendations for Improving School Connectedness for ELLs:

1. Newcomer students should be paired with peer "buddies"—ideally successful ELL students--upon their enrollment, introduced to counselors, and shown campus resources that can assist them.
2. ELL students should not be isolated in portable buildings. Clustering classes together is efficient, but housing students in separate buildings for multiple class periods creates difficulties with communication and interaction.
3. All classrooms should be equipped with television sets, or other media used to transmit announcements daily. Major communications should occur in English and Spanish. This should apply to in-class announcements, meetings with parents, and written communications home.
4. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel should be personal and consistent in maintaining parent contact.
5. Economics and/or family circumstances need to be taken into account when promoting home/school relations. ELL parents should be invited to attend vital school meetings well in advance, rather than informed of

functions. Bus passes should be provided, and small children could be allowed to attend some meetings with parents. School orientations and other important events should be presented in students' first languages.

6. English classes for adults should be offered on site; these should be free or inexpensive for parents.
7. Activity sponsors should recruit from every school population. Activity descriptions and requirements should be shared early in the school year, and information distributed in students' first languages.
8. Schools should be more creative in their parent activities, providing events such as camps and parent/student team activities.

Recommendations for Developing Self-Image and Self-Efficacy for ELLs:

1. Student opinions should be sought through survey, representative meetings, or open forum; all student groups should be included.
2. Struggling students should be given priority in meeting with academic counselors and in accessing certain resources. A Spanish fluent counselor should be added.
3. Diversity and sensitivity training should be required of staff members and included in student curriculum.
4. Teachers should employ the "buddy system" in class for ELL students to assist one another, and should include group work/cooperative activities to ensure that ELLs are consistently involved in formal and informal exchanges.
5. Bilingual teachers should be included in after-school support programs such as tutorials.
6. ELL students should be paired with mentors who are attending or have completed college; ideally mentors would be successful scholars who were once ELL.

7. Some means should be established to promote interaction by students with different languages and different cultures; these should occur during class time and during unstructured times as well.

Recommendations for Promoting Ongoing Progress for ELLs:

1. Struggling ELL students should be identified early on, and proper intervention strategies put in place to support them—including tutorials, strategic grouping for instruction, and summer school.
2. ELL students' credit status should be reviewed every semester, and credit options explored--such as community service for students with excessive absences. Students with truancy problems should be assisted in improving attendance.
3. All students should be oriented with graduation standards, and with advancement requirements.
4. Courses for ELL students should be taken in a logical order, not on a space-available basis.
5. "College" and "career" days should be consistently provided for all students, and should include financial aid and Texas Grant information.
6. Data should drive decision making for ELL students, but qualitative research should also be considered. Parents should be included in decision making processes for ELLs.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although a valuable beginning, this study just "scratches the surface" of strengths, struggles, and ideas for improvement for Central High School's ELL programs. Overwhelmingly, students and staff members express that campus programs for ELL students have improved and continue to improve, and that the

school organization is genuinely caring and conscientious toward the happiness and success of English Language Learners. To welcome research such as this indicates that district and campus leaders also care. While the study reveals many positive aspects of the ELL experience at Central High School, both the student and staff groups voice concerns that need to be recognized and considered by decision makers.

Further research should address these concerns, and explore other relevant issues for ELLs. Both Newcomer and veteran ELL students offer valuable perspectives worth noting. While Newcomers experience multiple demands and numerous obstacles in their new environment, the returning or upper level students face other challenges such as greater expectations and diminishing support as they join the ranks of non-ELL Central High School students. For this reason, future studies should be sure to include a wide range of academic experience. Broader staff representation in future studies would also provide a more complete portrait of perspectives.

To achieve greater participation, the research process should begin early in the school year. Also, the survey and interview protocols should be translated into other languages in addition to Spanish. Students whose first language is not English or Spanish may well have other perspectives that this research does not capture. Vietnamese and Farsi, for example, are first languages for a number of Central High School ELLs.

As academic and other programs evolve at Central High School, their effects on English Language Learners should be evaluated. The move toward increased mainstreaming of second year English Language Learners (for example) is a new schema for the 2006-2007 school year. Some students and staff members support this change, while others are cautious. Plans such as this should be monitored closely and evaluated carefully, and ample teaching and learning resources provided--as teachers make the transition from an ELL "pull-out" program to one in which most ELL students are mainstreamed. Because the responsibility for serving this diverse group is now shared among teachers in all disciplines, consistent communication among teachers is essential to creating lessons, programs, and environments that support language development, content support, and social interaction for English Language Learners. As one staff member stated:

> This is a timely topic for our school. We need to get our school to realize that these kids are not these kids, they're our kids. They're our opportunity, not our problem. We have to change. It's not them; it's us.

ELL parents should be including in critical conversations and an ongoing dialogue to pool opinions and ideas of all stakeholders, and improve service to these students. Parents' perspectives count. Inclusion of parent perspectives in future research would create a triangulation among students, staff member, and parents--thus providing an even clearer picture of "The Lived Reality of English Language Learners in An Urban High School".

Other schools that serve high-ELL populations should pursue their own improvement efforts, while considering the findings of this research. As one Central High School staff member noted, success for English Language Learners is highly possible if schools are conscientious:

> I think the ELL students all have opportunities. I have confidence that if we are committed to their success, and the students are committed to learning, they can get that one year certificate, perhaps a two-year. I know there are ELL kids that are going to four year colleges right out of here; so, it's not impossible. I think if we could nurture them more here and help scaffold their learning, they would not be as frustrated, and think that they're not going to college or going to obtain good jobs. Everyone with further education is going to make at a better level.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Student Survey (Spanish)

Nombre_____ Fecha_____
Grado_____ Cumpleaños_____
_____Hombre _____Mujer Clase de ESOL_____

Encuesta para los estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés

Por favor indica hasta que punto estás de acuerdo con las siguientes frases. El número "1" indica que no estás nada de acuerdo con la frase y el número "6" indica que estás completamente de acuerdo con la frase. Pónle un círculo a tu respuesta.

Frase	Nada de Acuerdo					Muy de Acuerdo
1. La escuela es muy difícil para mí; yo no soy un buen estudiante.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Probablemente sí, voy a pasar la mayoría de mis clases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Es fácil hacer amigos(as) aquí, yo le caigo bien a los otros estudiantes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. No tengo el suficiente número de créditos para estar en el grado que me corresponde.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. A los maestros(as) en esta escuela no les importan los estudiantes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Los maestros(as) enseñan sus clases muy bien.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Esta escuela ofrece muchas oportunidades y ayuda para los estudiantes aparte de la enseñanza en las clases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Yo no participo en actividades escolares aparte de asistir a mis clases (por ejemplo: béisbol).	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. La mayoría del tiempo no me siento contento en esta escuela.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Yo voy a graduarme de la escuela secundaria.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Mis padres asisten a actividades o eventos escolares con frequencia.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. No he aprendido mucho inglés en la escuela.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Los maestros(as) en esta escuela no les enseñan bien a los estudiantes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Yo soy buen estudiante, y para mi la escuela es fácil.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Frase	Nada de Acuerdo					Muy de Acuerdo
15. Yo he aprendido mucho inglés en esta escuela.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Por lo general me siento feliz en esta escuela.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Para mi es difícil hacer y sostener amigos(as) en la escuela; yo no le caigo bien a los otros estudiantes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Mis padres no asisten a muchas de las actividades o eventos escolares.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. Esta escuela no ofrece muchas oportunidades y ayuda para los estudiantes aparte de la enseñanza en las clases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Yo participo en actividades escolares aparte de asistir a mis clases (por ejemplo: béisbol).	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Probablemente no voy a pasar la mayoría de mis clases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. Yo no voy a graduarme de la escuela secundaria.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. Sí tengo el suficiente número de créditos para estar en el grado que me corresponde.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. A los maestros(as) en esta escuela, sí les importan los estudiantes.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Muchas gracias por el generoso regalo de tu tiempo. Tus respuestas posiblemente serán utilizadas para mejorar los servicios para los estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés en esta escuela secundaria.

APPENDIX II: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Student Survey (English)

Name_____ Date_____
Grade_____ Birth date_____
_____Male _____Female ESOL Class_____

Survey Questions for Student

Please indicate to what degree you are in agreement with the following statements. The number "1" indicates that you do not agree with the statement at all and the number "6" indicates that you agree with the statement completely. Put a circle around your answer.

Statement	Do not agree at all.					Agree completely
1. School is difficult for me; I am not a good student.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I will probably pass most of my classes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. It is easy to make and keep friends here; other students like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I do not have enough credits to be placed in the grade where I belong.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Teachers here do not care about their students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Teachers here provide good instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. This school offers many opportunities and assistance to students in addition to classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I do not participate in extra-curricular activities (example: baseball).	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I am not usually happy at this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I will graduate from high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. My parents often attend school functions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I have not learned much English in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. The teachers here do not instruct well.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. School is easy for me; I am a good student.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Statement	Do not agree at all.					Agree completely
15. I have learned a lot of English in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I am usually happy in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. It is difficult for me to make and keep friends here; other students do not like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. My parents do not usually attend school events.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. This school does not offer many opportunities and assistance for students in addition to classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I participate in extra-curricular activities (example baseball).	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. I will probably not pass most of my classes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I will not graduate from high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. I have enough credits to be placed in the grade level where I belong.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Teachers here care about the students.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for the generous gift of your time. Your responses will be used to improve programs for ELL students in your school.

APPENDIX III: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Staff Survey (English)

Name_____ Date_____
Teaching Assignment:_____
_____Male _____Female Years of Experience:_____

Survey Statements for Staff Members

Please indicate to what degree you are in agreement with the following statements. The number "1" indicates that you do not agree with the statement at all and the number "6" indicates that you agree with the statement completely. Put a circle around your answer.

Statement	Do not agree at all.					Agree completely
1. School is difficult for ELL students; they do not consider themselves strong students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.Most of my ELLs will not pass my class(es).	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. It is easy for ELLs to make and keep friends here: they are well liked.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Most ELLs are not accruing enough credits to be place at grade level.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Teachers here do not care about ELL students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Teachers here provide good instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. This school offers many opportunities and assistance to students in addition to classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Most ELLs do not participate in extra-curricular activities (example: baseball).	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Most ELLs are not usually happy at this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Most ELLs will graduate from high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. ELL parents often attend school functions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Most ELLs have not learned much English in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. The teachers here do not instruct well.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Statement	Do not agree at all					Agree completely
14. School is easy for most ELLs; they consider themselves strong student.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Most ELLs have learned a lot of English in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Most ELLs are usually happy in this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. It is difficult for ELLs to make and keep friends here; other students do not like them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. ELL parents do not usually attend school events.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. This school does not offer many opportunities and assistance for students in addition to classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Most ELLs participate in extra-curricular activities (example baseball).	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Most ELLs will probably not pass most of my classes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. Most ELLs will not graduate from high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. Most ELLs have enough credits to be placed in the grade level where they belong.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Teachers here care about the students.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for the generous gift of your time. Your responses will be used to improve programs for ELL students in your school.

APPENDIX IV: Lived Reality of ELL Students: Student Interview Protocol (Spanish)

Entrevista de los estudiantes protocolo

Nombre del Estudiante_____ Fecha_____

Fecha de Cumpleaños_____ Hombre____ Mujer____ Nivel de ESOL_____

1. ¿Cómo son el ambiente, la cultura y tus experiencias díarias en esta escuela? Por favor explícame tu respuesta. ¿Cómo crees que son el ambiente, la cultura y las experiencias díarias para los otros estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés?

2. ¿Sientes que tienes confianza en tí mismo para aprender en tus clases? ¿Te sientes agusto y cómodo participando, hablando, y trabajando con los otros estudiantes en tus clases?

3. ¿Cuáles son los aspectos buenos/fuertes o malos/debíles del programa de instrucción para los otros estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés? Por ejemplo: los cursos de estudio - primero ESOL 1, ESOL 2, y luego English 3. ¿Qué recomendarías para mejorar el programa para los otros estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés?

4. ¿Sientes que las maneras de enseñanza de los maestros(as) están funcionando bien para los estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés? ¿Cuáles maneras de enseñanza funcionán major?

5. ¿Tus maestros(as) utilizan materiales de enseñanza que son efectivos y adequados? ¿Cuáles otros materiales o recursos le recomenardías tu al programa?

6. En general, ¿te sientes contento(a) en esta escuela secundaria? Por favor explícame tu respuesta. ¿Sientes que los otros estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés están contentos es esta escuela secundaria? Por favor explícame tu respuesta.

7. ¿Cuáles son las cosas que te ayudan o te estorban para que puedas participar en las actividades después de la escuela o durante los fines de semana?

8. ¿Piensas graduarte de la escuela secundaria? ¿Esperas continuar con tus estudios después de graduarte de la escuela secundaria? ¿Qué piensas son las esperanzas de los otros estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés sobre graduarse de la escuela secundaria y continuar con sus estudios?

9. Si eres un poco mayor que los otros estudiantes en alguna clase, ¿te causa esto algún problema. Por favor explícame tu respuesta.

10. ¿Te preocupa que no vayas a pasar las clases que estás tomando este año? Si llegarás a reprobrar alguna clase, ¿cómo crees que te afectaría?

11. ¿Con frequencia pides y consigues ayuda extra para tus estudios? Por favor explícame tu respuesta.

12. ¿Tu papá, mamá o guardián participan en actividades o eventos en esta escuela al grado que les gustaría? ¿Cómo podría la escuela mejorar las oportunidades para que ellos(as) participen más?

13. Algunos estudiantes que están aprendiendo el inglés tienen más éxito en la escuela que otros estudiantes. ¿A qué crees que se deba el éxito de estos estudiantes?

14. ¿Tienes alguna otra cosa relacionada a estos temas de los cuáles hemos platicado que te gustaría añadir?

Muchas gracias por el generoso regalo de tu tiempo. Tus respuestas posiblemente serán utilizadas para mejorar los servicios para los estudiantes qué están aprendiendo el inglés en esta escuela secundaria.

APPENDIX V: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Student Interview (English)

Student Name (Optional): _____ Date: _____
Birth date: _____ ___Male ___Female ESOL Level: _____

1. What is this school environment (culture, climate, daily experience) like for you? For other ELL students? Please explain.

2. Do you feel confident as a scholar? Are you comfortable participating and interacting in class?

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this high school's instructional program (example: course work and curriculum) for ELL students? What improvements would you recommend?

4. Do you feel teaching approaches here are working well for ELL students? Particularly, which ones?

5. Do your teachers utilize adequate and effective teaching materials? What additional resources or materials would you recommend?

6. Overall, are you happy in this high school? Please explain. Do you feel most ELL students are happy at this high school? Why do you think so/not?

7. What do you see as enablers or barriers to your participation in extra-curricular activities?

8. Do you expect to graduate high school? Do you expect to continue school beyond high school? What do you think the expectations of other ELL students are in these areas?

9. If you are over age in your particular grade level or in a particular course, does this pose problems for you? Explain.

10. Are you concerned that you may not pass your course work this year? If you do not, how will this affect you?

11. Do you often seek and/or secure extra help here? If not, why not?

12. Do your parents/guardians participate in school activities/events as much as they would like to? What could improve their opportunities to participate?

13. Some ELL students are more successful in school than others. Why do you think this is so??

14. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for the generous gift of your time. Your responses may be used to help improve services for ELL students in your high school.

APPENDIX VI: The Lived Reality of English Language Learners: Staff Interview Protocol

Staff Member Name (Optional): _____ Date: _____
Teaching Assignment: _____ Years Experience: _____

1. What do you think this school environment (culture, climate, daily experience) is like for ELL students? Why do you think this?

2. How would you compare the confidence your ELL student have in themselves as scholars with the confidence of non-ELL students? Give examples (including interactions).

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this high school's instructional design (example: course work and curriculum) for ELL students? What improvements would you recommend?

4. Do you feel pedagogical approaches here are working well for ELL students? Particularly, which ones?

5. Are adequate resources available to assist you in ELL instruction? What do you need most in this area?

6. Do you feel most ELL students are happy at this high school? Why do you think so/not?

7. What do you see as enablers or barriers to student participation in extra-curricular activities?

8. In your opinion, do most ELL students view graduation and post-secondary schooling as goals they will accomplish?

9. Does being over age at a particular grade level or in a particular course pose problems for ELL students or their teachers? Explain.

10. Compared with your other students, is the passing rate for ELL students lower, higher, or about the same? Why do you think this is so?

11. Do ELL students often seek and/or secure extra help here? If so, how do you know? If not, why do you think this is so?

12. Compared with other students, do ELL parents/guardians participate in school activities/events more, less, about the same? What accounts for this?

13. How do you explain the wide variation in success of ELL students?

14. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for the generous gift of your time. Your responses may be used to help improve services for ELL students in your high school.

APPENDIX VII: An Important Consideration

An Important Consideration

It is important to convey that this study is not a response to disenchantment or complaint from ELL students, parents, or the school community. In addition, some performance indicators show improvement for ELL students, and some achievement gaps between ELL students and the general school population are narrowing. The 2006-2007 school year brought many changes for ELL students, such as relocation of the ESOL classes from portable buildings into the main school structure, and full-day academic mainstreaming of most ELLs. In addition, special instructional materials were acquired to support ELLs in the content areas of Science, and Social Studies, and mainstreamed English. The short and long-term effects that may result from these changes will be borne out by data, and by student success demonstrated in areas that data alone may not capture. This study is based on the lived reality of English Language Learners for the school year 2005-2006 only.

While parent involvement for some ELL students may be hindered by barriers such as language, parent support as measured by trust and compliance with school staff and school operations is considered to be very good. Parents were not included as study participants for this study, but their involvement in discussions of the research findings may provide a needed vehicle for improved communication and increased school involvement. In any follow-up studies, ELL parents should be included, to honor and consider their perspectives as to what school life and opportunities are like for their children, and to triangulate the research data.

Through a better understanding of ELL students' ideas and struggles should come knowledge that schools can use to better serve students. Service to ELL students should be viewed as an opportunity, rather than as a problem.

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VITA

Mary Wiley Bashara, daughter of Nettie Faye Owens and Morris Clayton Owens, M.A. was born in San Marcos, Texas, on December 31, 1950. She graduated from Oglesby High School in 1969. Subsequently, she studied English, Government and Spanish at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, and received a Bachelor of Arts Degree and Texas Teaching Certificate in 1972. Mary began her teaching career in Elgin ISD as a Bilingual Education instructor and high school Spanish teacher. In 1975, she returned to Southwest Texas State to seek elementary certification in addition to her secondary certification. She received her elementary, Bilingual, and ESOL Texas teaching certificates in 1978.

Mary taught Spanish, English, elementary education, Bilingual Education, and ESOL in Elgin ISD, Hutto ISD, Round Rock ISD, and Austin ISD for twenty-four years. As a Bilingual teacher as AISD, she was selected as Elementary Teacher of the Year in 1985.

She entered the Foundations in Education Principalship Program in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas in the summer 1995. Mary graduated with her M.Ed. in Policy and Planning in December 1996, and received certification to become a school Principal in May, 1997. She then entered the Ph.D. Program for Educational Policy and Planning, and worked as a Graduate Assistant with Dr. Terry Clark in the Educational Productivity Council on important projects for Texas Independent School Districts. She co-presented “Social Promotion in Texas” with Dr.

Clark to then Texas Governor George W. Bush's Office, and at the American Educational Research Association's Annual Conference in Montreal, Canada in 1998.

Mary entered public school administration, and served as an AISD administrator for seven years—as Assistant Principal at Pecan Springs Elementary School, Sidney Lanier High School, and Lyndon B. Johnson High School. Committed to improving education for at-risk students, Mary was appointed Principal of Austin Can! Academy, where she served for one year before returning to the University of Texas to conclude Ph.D. studies. While leading Austin Can!, she completed coursework for the Cooperative Superintendency Program at the University of Texas. This spring, Mary presented highlights of her dissertation research, "The Lived Reality of English Language Learners in an Urban High School: Perspectives of Students and Staff" at the Annual Student Research Conference at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Mary is currently serving as Assistant Principal at Lyndon B. Johnson High School Liberal Arts and Science Academy.

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